WEEKLY APR. 21, 1928

The Popular

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Ox Train
by
ROBERT
J.
PEARSALL

Beginning
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by
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BUCK

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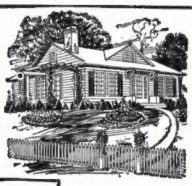
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REWARD

Find the "One" House That

Is Different From the Others—It's FREE

There are 14 six-room houses pictured here. To be sure they all look alike, but examine them closely. Thirteen of them are exactly alike, but one, and only one, is different. It isn't as easy as it looks. See if you can find the different one. It is going to be given away ABSOLUTELY FREE.

4

8

These Clues Will Help You

At first glance all the pictures look alike, but on closer examination you will see that one, and only one, differs in some way from all the others. The difference may be in the fence, steps or even shutters. If you can find the one house that is different from all the others write me TODAY QUICK. You may become the owner of this house without one cent of cost to you.

5

9

Built Anywhere in U. S.

The one house that is different from all the others is going to be given away ABSOLUTELY FREE. It makes no difference where you live. The house can be built anywhere in the U. S., and if you do not own a lot I will even arrange to buy a lot on which to build the house. A beautiful and comfortable six-room house may be yours if you can find the different house. Certainly you have longed for the day to come when you could own your own home—this is your golden opportunity. Act QUICK.

6

10

You Cannot Lose

Positively every one taking advantage of this opportunity is rewarded. Find the one house that is different from all the others and rush your name and address to me TODAY. A postal card will do, just say, "House No. —is different from all the others. Without any obligation please tell me how I can get this fine six-room house without one cent of cost to me."

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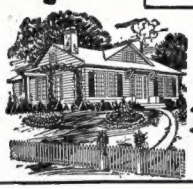
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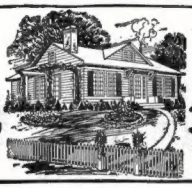
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The complete novel in next week's issue of THE POPULAR, "The Sky Buccaneers," by Will McMorrow, is just the sort of story that every man who likes action and is alive to the world about him will want to read. It tells of the magnificent world air travel of the near future and of a ruthless air bandit and his vicious pirate crew.

Volume XC Number 5

The Popular

PUBLISHED WEEKLY

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YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION, $6.00 SINGLE COPY, 15 CENTS

Ox Train

By

Robert J. Pearsall

Author of "Double Salvage," Etc.

Tom Stecker simply had to stow away in that partic him away; but he made them take him back—and it

CHAPTER I.

THE PERSISTENT PASSENGER.

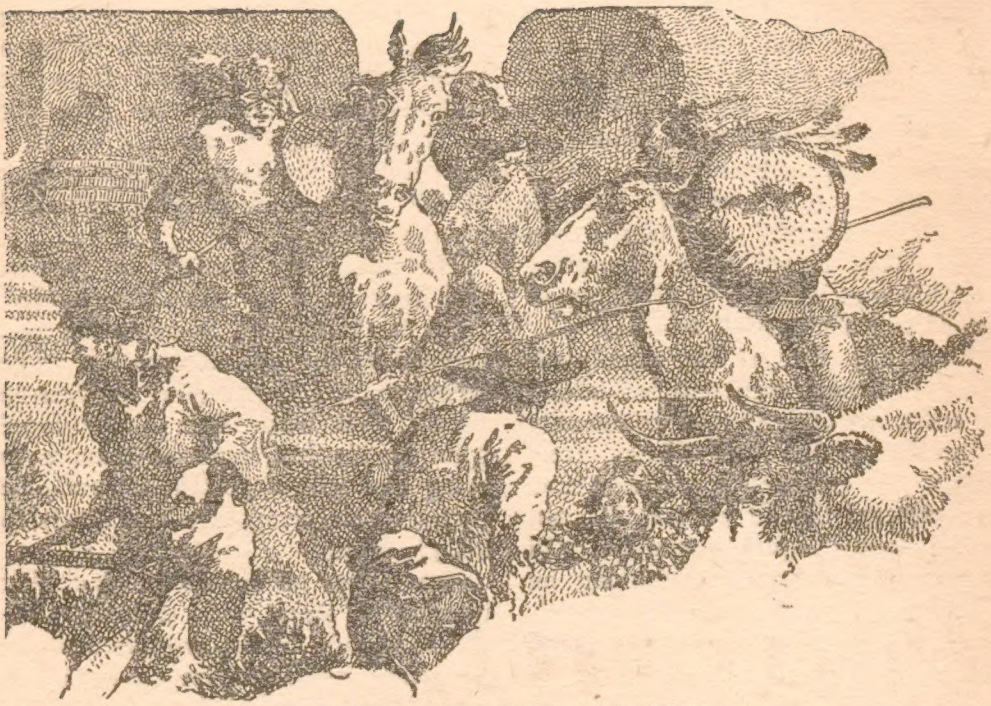
VERY uncomfortably quartered, even for a stowaway, was Tom Stecker, jammed into the tail of the rearmost of the long train of prairie schooners, which rolled and lurched, wallowed and dived, westward along the billowy Great Salt Lake Trail.

Into this niche, driven by twin desires—to escape and to pursue—he had crawled at Council Bluff. He had endured four days already. If Fate continued kind he would lie concealed four days more, though every bump of the wagon bed drew throbbing protests from a dozen bruises on his long body, extended across it.

And there were other discomforts. Every time the rear wheels sank into a rut, the leg of an upset kitchen table dug into his spine. That was inescapable, for his face and body were already flattened against the wagon's tailboard. His legs from the knee down were bent backward into cramping confinement between the side of the wagon and a cook stove. But it was confinement less painful, because self-chosen, than that from which he had fled; and the grimaces that each jolt drew from him were two thirds resolute grins.

"By gum! I'll stick to the Indian country. I'll stick—stick—stick!"

It grew into a song, that oft-repeated word—an anthem to the great god Stick-to-it-iveness—its rhythm set to the plodding movements of the oxen ahead. *Stick - stick - stickety - stick!* Which was all to the good, because it was needed; but to give himself something else to think about, Tom had



A COMPLETE NOVEL

ular ox train. When they discovered him they turned turned out to be a mighty good thing for the train.

contrived a rearward view by lifting the canvas that covered the furniture an inch or so from the tailboard.

Usually there was nothing to see but the rolling Nebraska prairie, its vivid green broken only by the dirty-gray, zigzag trail, or sometimes by the wide, muddy Platte River to the north. Now and then a phalanx of giant curlews wheeled above it on cinnamon wings, with their wildest of prairie cries, "Kooloo, kooloo!" Oftener a coyote slunk over a rise, or a gaunt gray wolf meditated hungrily upon the train. Occasionally mounted men or courting couples rode behind it, and then Tom forgot all discomfort in studying them.

"Some one's the man—but which? Brand of good luck on him—but which?" That was what Tom had to find. He saw nothing that helped him, but much that was interesting.

For instance, there was the captain of the train, a middle-aged, powerful-looking man named Kastner. Tom saw him often with a girl, a vivid, sun-browned creature, fragile-appearing, but strong. Though she rode with him, she disliked him—Tom grew sure of that. Once he leaned from his horse and kissed her, and her face grew colorless and her body tense as she yielded; but she did yield. A curious, unpleasant incident to watch, and one that set Tom brooding.

"You'd think by her looks she wouldn't stand that," he thought vaguely, drawing what insight his inexperience could from the pure, child-like delicacy of her features, coupled with a certain maturity and firmness of her mouth, chin and forehead.

It was none of his business, of course; but he continued to watch and

listen, learning that her name was Myrtle Snyder, and that another man who sometimes rode with her was her father—a mediocre-looking individual, whom Tom suspected of a weak chin behind his graying beard.

"What's he to do with it? Something, I'll be bound." And as the days passed, Tom turned more frequently from his own mission to thoughts of the girl and her possible troubles.

Other little slices of life, already advanced to drama, were enacted behind the train, for this was a community of neighbors that had started from Illinois for Oregon's promised land. Tom gathered that they were all farmers but Kastner—people who had sold everything and staked everything on this move. Not at all the sort to welcome a penniless intruder; but he would stick, stick, stick, till he got so far they couldn't send him back.

Meanwhile, though the days were torture, he could stretch his limbs during the night.

A watch was always set, but at a distance from the camp, and Tom could creep out, forage food and water, and lie until nearly dawn, under the wagon. Several times he had been nearly caught. Once he had been sure the driver of the wagon had seen him. It seemed he hadn't, or had good-naturedly held his tongue. There were men like that.

Anyway, he had been lucky so far—but what was that?

With cries of "Whoa!" starting away ahead and running along the line, the train stopped. Then came the distant crackling of a braided lash and shouts at oxen. The foremost wagon must have stalled. A pause, then a hoarse "Heave-oh!" and each wagon in turn moved up, to stop again as the foremost were shoved and pulled over one of the many inescapable deep ruts.

Finally Tom's wagon rolled down into it, and men came behind it to push. By then Tom had lowered the canvas; but one of the men, to get a better hold, lifted it again from the tailboard, and Tom knew that his stowaway's rôle was ended.

"Well, by the Lord Almighty, look at this here excess of freight!" cried his discoverer.

He thrust the canvas up farther, and Tom began to unscramble himself from the furniture. Some of the men laughed at the difficult process, while others shouted the news of the find up ahead. But when Tom finally faced them on his feet, most of them were eying him with a certain respect, due partly to his composure and partly to his physique.

For it was an unabashed giant that grinned at them, with strength written as plainly in his angular features and wide, humorous mouth as in his lean, lengthy, broad-shouldered body. Still, he was an unwanted intruder—they didn't forget that for a minute—and some of their eyes rested suspiciously on his corduroy trousers and linsey-woolsey shirt, which were charred from fire in a dozen places.

"Been smokin' in there?" queried his discoverer.

"Not a single smoke," said Tom. "Got these burns in an accident."

"Whereabout was the accident?"

"Point east of Council Bluff."

"Well, you'll return to that same point. See here, Mount, what you've been cumberin' yourself with."

This remark was addressed to the driver of the wagon, a burly, hairy man with a red, round face and a flaming-red beard. He had regarded Tom's emergence without the least astonishment, and now favored him with a low, friendly wink.

"Never noticed no encumbrance at all. Pete's sake! A man wantin' to get West that bad——"

"Ought to be willin' to pay his way," put in the other. "I bet you knew you

were totin' him. Better pass the word up for Captain Kastner. Oh, here he is."

For at that moment the man referred to reined his horse around the corner of the wagon. The growing group of hard-handed, strong-faced men, women of all farming types, and rather wild-looking children, made way for him with alacrity. He pressed through them until his stirrup touched Tom's arm, and looked down upon Tom with stern, smoky-black eyes.

"Stowaway, eh? How've you been riding?"

"Darn uncomfortably," Tom grinned placatingly.

But Kastner repeated with a flash of impatience:

"I say, how've you been riding?"

"Here," said Tom meekly, parting the flap and showing him.

"Um! It'll be easier walking."

"Whole heaps," said Tom agreeably and hopefully. "If you'll just give me a chance to work my way."

"Work nothing! It's the other way you'll be walking, and that right quick."

Tom's smile faded, but there was no use getting angry. Kastner was doing his duty, he supposed. Tom's eyes remained calm and friendly as they searched the other faces. They were mostly not unkindly; but he read pretty general assent to Kastner's words.

"Look here, youngster," said one man slowly, "this here can't be allowed. If it was, there'd be no end to it, and it ain't fair. Take us—we've all thrown into this expedition. Cost us hundreds of dollars apiece, besides our stock and wagons and the like. No one let to join unless he could throw in, be he the best of friends. Now you come along, and just because you manage to hide out a few days, you expect us to share up with you. Gosh, man! We can only carry so much—likely to go hungry ourselves. I ask you, is it reasonable?"

A slow flush glowed through Tom's tan at that; but though it made him out to be a beggar, he would go on pleading. He had to.

"I'll do anything, just anything, if you'll let me keep on with you. I'd ought to be able to earn my keep. I can walk or work or ride or shoot with any man."

"Shoot! Why, dammit," said some one, chuckling, "you ain't even got a gun."

Tom's steady gray eyes flickered a bit at that, for it was the extreme lack. And he saw how his cause was hurt thereby—how everybody stirred with increased suspicion, which Kastner proceeded to voice.

"That fits in with the burns on your clothes—you left between daylights. You'd ought to be searched, but I'll pass that. You broke out of somewheres, but we can't waste time with you. There's your trail, and you take it."

He pointed back to the east with his short riding whip.

But then Mount, speaking softly, put in:

"What about Injuns, captain? It'd be a helluva trick to deliver a white man up to them."

Whereupon Kastner displayed a certain keenness.

"That was what he was figuring on. If he'd got a few days further in, we'd have had to keep him. But this isn't regular Indian country, and we haven't seen any Indian signs. He'll have to take his chances, anyway."

"But not without grub and water," said Mount, still more softly, at which several others nodded agreement.

"I suppose not," Kastner said grudgingly. "Here, you, come with me."

He touched Tom with his whip.

It was but the slightest flick, hardly to be felt; but the contempt in Kastner's voice gave it weight. Suddenly, with hardly a change of feature, hardly

a sign of anger, Tom reached up with his hand. It seemed an effortless movement, yet was so swift that no eye followed it. The spectators saw merely that the whip was miraculously in Tom's hand, and that he was raising it against Kastner.

Then, with a sudden reversal of intention, he was handing it to Kastner instead.

"You dropped this, captain," said Tom evenly, looking deep into Kastner's eyes.

Indeed, so swiftly did everything happen, and so unchanged was Tom's tone, that most of the group were not sure that the thing had not happened as Tom's word indicated. But all the same, their eyes hung on Tom, observing the rigidity of his face, until Mount broke the chilled silence by stepping forward.

"I'll outfit you, youngster."

Kastner, glaring at Tom, hesitated, then wheeled his horse away with a gruff:

"Do it, then—and you be off."

Tom, turning to Mount, caught Myrtle Snyder's eyes fixed upon him. Pity and fear for him seemed to be in that gaze—and was there inner tragedy, too? He put that thought sternly aside, as he had put aside his rage, reminding himself:

"I've gotta stick—stick—stick! One thing to do, that's all. And it's enough."

Ten minutes later, he was hitting the back trail on foot, with the train moving half as fast in the opposite direction. But thereafter his pace slackened. He kept looking over his shoulder, and when the last wagon of the train was a mere dot on the far horizon, he turned and started after it.

"Huh! The prairie's free, anyway."

So for an hour he plodded, neither gaining nor losing distance, a lonely figure lost in the twin infinities of earth and sky, headed into the heart of unmeasured distances. Lonely, friendless, but now and then smiling grimly.

"Can't keep me from following, and I'm guessing I won't starve."

His mind was entirely on the caravan, and ways and means of joining it again. But, being a frontiersman, every minute or two he swept the whole horizon with his eyes as habitually as he took his steps, and so immediately observed the troop of horsemen that came into view over the curve of the prairie, miles behind him.

Instantly he crouched and darted from the trail. With only his head showing above the tall grass, he watched and waited. He was sure the horsemen had not seen his comparatively small figure. But when he saw their feathered headdresses, he crawled on a little farther.

Presently the troop swept past, perhaps a hundred Indians quite naked save for breechclouts and moccasins. They sat their ponies lithely, erect, their movements flowing with the animals. They were great of chest and broad of jaw, with wide, thin lips and restless, relentless eyes. Their faces and bodies were painted grotesquely. By their markings they were Pawnees—off their territory and out for a kill.

Tom watched them go. The wagon train was in their path. They would see the white-topped wagons long before they could be seen. But they would hardly attack till just before daybreak. They almost never did, unless circumstances especially favored them. Wiliest of redskins, the Pawnees had discovered that it is in the gray hour before dawn that the white man's nerves are slackest. And tonight, particularly, there would be a nearly full moon until almost sunrise.

Cautiously keeping down, yet with a great hurry in his movements, Tom crept off southward at a right angle to the trail. His almost grotesquely angular face was perfectly calm. Only

his eyes had changed a little—a hint of hope, of eagerness, perhaps even of thankfulness entering into their gray, stubborn depths.

CHAPTER II.

THE INDIAN ATTACK.

IT was late in the afternoon when Tom took off on that roundabout flanking movement, the only one by which he could get safely past the keen-sensed Indians to the train. When he finally approached the train, the night was nearly gone.

If warning had been needed sooner, he would likely have delivered it, but he took the way of least risk. He had no way of knowing where the Pawnees would spend the night, how close to the caravan they would creep; but he was sure that they would not pass it. Nor would the Pawnees camp on the trail; they would move off to the north or to the south. His task, then, was to make a detour so wide that they could not possibly observe him, to strike the trail again at a point ahead of the train, and so to approach it safely from the west.

It was a long trip and a hard one, for at first he dared not walk upright; and even when he did, the nearly waist-deep, matted prairie grass opposed him unrelentingly. The hot, implacable sun opposed him, too, and even night, when it came, was unfriendly with brilliant moon and starlight. Farther and farther to the south he must curve, making allowance for any possible tendency of the trail in that direction. But when, feeling sure he had passed the train, he finally turned northward, he decided from the distance he had to travel that it must have curved to the north, instead.

But at last he struck it, and broke into a slow run eastward. He was still jogging, arms and body relaxed, when he saw the huddle of white-topped wagons a little off the trail to the south. At the same moment a voice challenged him from out of the grass.

"Hey! Who's that?"

Tom slowed to a walk and pitched his voice low.

"Just me—Tom Stecker."

"Who in time is Tom Stecker?"

But the other imitated Tom's cautious tone, and slowly erected himself from the grass.

"Well, I'll be darned," as he recognized Tom. "Ain't there nothin' on earth goin' to keep you away from this outfit?"

Tom stopped in front of the sentry. He was breathing almost normally in spite of the long run.

"Some folks don't reco'nize when they need a man. Before half an hour, figuring sunrise in that time, you'll all be mighty glad I come back. I want to see Captain Kastner. You take me in."

"Say, Captain Kastner'll skin you. Oh, all right," he said, as Tom, with a hand on his arm, gently faced him around toward the camp.

"But what's up?" queried the sentry, starting off.

In about three sentences, Tom told him.

"Maybe they're watching right now, so better hurry."

"Gosh!" The sentry quickened his step and lowered his voice to a husky whisper.

"But you come from the west," he pursued curiously. "Oh, I see. You had to circle. Say, youngster, have you been movin' ever since we druv you out?"

"Yes," said Tom, and disregarded the other's admiring oath to study the position of the wagons.

They stood in a little vale, a hollow between encircling hills. The bottom of the vale was moist, and the oxen, still yoked two and two, had been turned adrift to feed. The horses were tethered at grazing intervals near

the wagons, which were drawn up as always in a close circle.

The sentry approached a certain wagon and scratched at the canvas top, calling Captain Kastner's name softly. There was an immediate stirring within.

"What's the matter?"

"Injuns! Better turn out."

In rather less than a minute, Kastner crawled out under the high seat and climbed down to the ground, fully clad. He shot one glance at Tom, but ignored him, and turned to the sentry, who quickly gave him the gist of Tom's story. Then Kastner turned to Tom.

"All that's true?" His voice was quite impersonal.

"Yes."

"Well, we're obliged to you." His tone warmed a little, and he went on swiftly:

"Wake the men, you two. Just wake 'em and whisper, 'On guard!' That's all. I'll see about calling in the other sentries."

He moved stealthily away from the train, and Tom and the sentry crawled between two wagons, locked front and rear, into the inclosed circle, which was perhaps seventy-five yards across.

The ground was strewed with the form of men sleeping in blankets, heads pillowed on boots and saddles. Tom went from man to man, shaking their shoulders, whispering in their ears. Most of them were instantly alert. They came up fully prepared, for they slept in their clothes and with arms to hand—rifles and the recently introduced heavy dragoon revolvers.

There was no confusion at all, for each man had his particular thing to do. Some of them went out to drive in the stock. Most of them scattered around the inclosure and began hauling out boxes, bales, and sacks of freight to pack against the outer wagon wheels and in the spaces between them.

Tom joined the latter group of workers, receiving and placing the freight as it was passed out of the wagons.

The women in the wagons were waking the children, some of whom began to cry. But they were quickly silenced by the word, "Indian!"—a training begun in babyhood. In a minute or two, the women and children began to abandon the wagons for a place in the center of the corral where another circle of boxes and bales was being constructed—a barricade within a barricade, behind which they could huddle. The horses and oxen were brought inside and tethered to the wagons.

Then the immigrants settled down to wait, the men under and beneath the wagons, peering through and over the barricade. When they spoke, it was in whispers, and in a curious commingling of courage and confessed fear. Kastner came along, inspecting the circle, with a spare rifle in his hand. Seeing Tom, he handed it to him with the admonition:

"Don't fire till you get the word."

Something in the act, the man's coolness, his unquestioning acceptance of Tom's story, his foresight in prearranging the defense, lessened Tom's dislike for Kastner. Still, Tom remembered a certain glitter behind the smoky luster of his eyes. But he was an efficient train captain, anyway. After inspecting the rifle, Tom settled himself with the rest, muzzle through a loophole.

Minutes passed. Outside was nothing but gloom and silence. Tom wondered what would happen if the attack failed to come. Probably he would be pronounced a liar and turned back—yes, almost certainly. Well, he needn't worry, he thought grimly, guiltily aware that he was almost glad for the menace of redskins which was enabling him to still stick to the train.

"By heck, his sign of good luck—whoever he is and *wherever* it is—is working for me," thought Tom, and just then the attack came, swift as the rush of waters from an exploded dam.

One moment there was nothing but the stars paling before the dawn and the far-away howl of a hunting coyote. As that howl died away, leaving a faint trail of ghostly sound, a body of horsemen debouched from the emptiness to the north, and came down upon the camp in a dusky, living cataract.

Tom watched them come, silent as phantom horsemen, with a tensing of every nerve. How helpless the darkened, seemingly sleeping camp must seem to them! A flash came to him of another picture, dimly remembered from his childhood—a similar charge upon a smaller body of settlers, in which his parents had died—and of himself, missed somehow in the slaughter, creeping away into the brush, a cowering, terrified, silent six-year-old. Well, he had found sanctuary. But what of him who had given it? Murdered, murdered—more vilely than Indians killed, struggling against the oncoming whites. Yes, he *must* stick to this caravan. Then into his thoughts broke shots and shrill yells from the Indians; and a shower of arrows and bullets impinged against the barricade and tore through the white hoods of the wagons.

But it was still several seconds later before Kastner cried loudly:

"Now!"

The rifles crashed in a single volley. The effect was terrible; Indians toppled all along the line, or, recovering their seats, wheeled and rode away wounded. But though the seemingly helpless camp had become a hydra spouting death, the sheer momentum of the charge carried it on, and the bulk of it hit the barricade with its pace hardly slackened.

Then there followed the shock and terror of chaos. Some of the Indians leaped from their mounts right over into the inclosure. Most of them remained outside, pelting the corral with bullets and arrows. The whites were using their revolvers now, firing furiously. Right next to Tom a man died. One minute he was kneeling, his revolver spitting fire; the next, with a choking cry, hands over head, he fell backward in a huddled, convulsed heap, an iron-pointed arrow through his throat.

Tom turned to get the dead man's revolver. In the interval he saw Mount grappling with an Indian. His red beard seemed bristling; he was chanting oaths like a litany. And in the moment that Tom watched he flung the Indian face downward across his bent right knee, and, shifting his hold, broke his back.

Turning away, Tom saw Myrtle Snyder's father behind the wagon next his own. Rage and the fury of battle had changed him, too; his infirm face was aflame, his almost slack lips were parted in a ferocious grin as he aimed and fired between the spokes of a wheel.

Tom again faced outward, just as the dusky wave began to retreat. Acting in unison at some signal, the mounted Indians fled, some swooping sideways from their ponies to pick up a wounded comrade, or help a dismounted warrior to leap up behind. But at a little distance they dropped their loads, and the inevitable circling attack began.

"Three times they'll go around us," Tom heard a man say. "Like Sioux they are, that way."

Now the defenders, who had concentrated along the north side of the corral, must reform their line. Again it appeared that each man knew his place. Some stayed where they were; others disposed themselves around the

unprotected portion of the circle. Tom saw Kastner place himself behind a wagon almost opposite his own position. Then the fight was on again, with the Indians galloping madly in a complete circle around the camp, lying upon their ponies' sides and firing under their throats.

The camp was thus ringed with fire, bullets and arrows tearing through the stockade from all points at once. Tom emptied his revolver. He crouched lower and half turned to load again from the dead man's belt. Then he found himself looking almost unbelievingly upon a most appalling thing.

Myrtle Snyder's father had squirmed around, facing inward. He was lying flat, with his rifle almost concealed alongside him on the ground. He was squeezing the trigger of the rifle, and its aim was directed straight against Kastner's back.

No one saw it but Tom. Everybody's attention was on the Indians. The report would go unobserved, of course, and the bullet be credited to the Indians. So, evidently, Snyder had figured.

Astonishment and horror chained Tom for an instant—then he tensed himself to leap upon Snyder. He would probably have been too late. But that instant Snyder seemed to sigh shudderingly. His body relaxed, his finger left the trigger; and slowly, with a suggestion of weakness and weariness, he crawled around to his place in line.

But he had wanted to kill Kastner. He had clearly intended to—probably had revolted against the treachery of the act rather than the act itself. Now, why?

Curiosity burned in Tom, and a certain sinister, unwelcome thought tingled through him as he himself faced about. Murderers are rare beings. Could there be two on this train? Had he already come to the conclusion of his quest—Myrtle Snyder's father?

Automatically he resumed firing, his interest in the fight almost shocked out of him. Anyway, it was nearly over. The Pawnees had completed their third circle. Their wounded had had time to creep away. Suddenly they wheeled outward and fled to the north. Most of the dismounted warriors had caught their beasts by now; they joined the flight. Some of their ponies carried an extra man, wounded or sound. They disappeared over the ridge, and in a little while their still-menacing cries had died into silence.

The whites were left to bury their dead, tend their wounded and count this first cost of their exodus. Three men were killed, five wounded. But no woman nor child had been hurt, and the wounded were all able to continue their journey. The train grieved for a while over the dead, but, as Mount declared:

"If it hadn't been for Tom—your name's Tom, ain't it?—there wouldn't have been a scalp lock left among us. There's a place on my seat for him, and I can whip the man that says he can't ride it."

That was along in the forenoon, when the train was almost ready to start. Tom was grateful for Mount's vehemence, but knew it unnecessary. His place in the train was assured. Even Kastner seemed friendly, had seemingly forgotten yesterday's episode.

But Tom wasn't sure whether he wanted to ride with Mount or not. He drew Mount to one side.

"Where's the Snyder wagon's place in line?"

Mount laughed knowingly and clapped him on the shoulder.

"Now I know I'll have you for a passenger. It's right ahead of ours—and you'll have Kastner for a rival."

"Fine!" grinned Tom. But it was

a long time before Mount learned Tom's principal reason for wanting to be near that wagon.

CHAPTER III.

DANCE ON THE PRAIRIE.

"SHE'S a girl in a thousand," declared Mount.

"Yes," agreed Tom reservedly.

"If I was a younker again I'd have more to say than that," said Mount resentfully. "Pity her mother ain't here," he added, with a significance that Tom well understood.

And Tom's eyes narrowed uneasily, yet with a glow in their depths, as they rested on the slatted sun-bonnet of Myrtle Snyder rising a little above the canvas top of the wagon ahead.

"Did you know her mother?" he asked.

"Sure did—most of her life. Which ended two years ago, and mighty bad luck to everybody. She was the man of the family. It's her that Myrtle takes after."

"No harm in Snyder, though," suggested Tom carelessly, yet feeling that he would give a whole lot for the true answer. A week had passed since the Indian attack; and each day Tom's memory of Snyder's rifle leveled murderously against Kastner seemed more incredible. Each day, too, Tom's own suspicion of Snyder faded.

There seemed no more inoffensive man on the train than Snyder, nor one less dangerous. Yet Tom had seen what he had seen. And he thought he was seeing another thing, too, hardly less base—that Snyder was forcing his daughter into Kastner's arms. For Snyder's appearance of friendship for Kastner was almost servile; and he was continually making opportunity for Myrtle and Kastner to be together. Myrtle, on her part, combined outward complaisance with dislike and fear of Kastner—Tom had a hundred signs of that—and what but her father's influence could be compelling her?

"Well, now, I'll tell you about Snyder," replied Mount. He paused to flick a buffalo fly from the flank of the off ox. "There's no harm in him—no. It's just that there's something lacking. You take these oxen, now—look at 'em."

Tom obediently transferred his attention to the yoke plodding ahead of the wagon, their great heads bent low, their cumbrous bodies swaying, their heavy feet lifting and falling, lifting and falling, in a slow, changeless rhythm.

"Looks like, if they start somewhere, they'll get there, don't they?" said Mount. "Always appeared to me that a good man's got to have something of the ox in him. Well, Snyder hasn't. He's—skittish!"

"Skittish, eh?" questioned Tom.

"Yeah—scairtlike," explained Mount. "Dodgin'—breakin' away—all his life. You take this expedition, for instance. He hadn't any call to come on it. He had a good place, well fixed and all, thanks mostly to his wife. Course, lots of us others had, too; but we're sort of pioneers, and he ain't. No call of the West in him. But Kastner got after him, 'count of Myrtle, I guess, and what d'you think fetched Snyder?"

"What?" asked Tom.

Mount chuckled.

"Scaredness! Scaredness over what was goin' to happen in Illinois when the slavery question popped open. Think of that! Kastner preached it to him right and left. So he's goin' out to Oregon to be *safe*. I bet when them Injuns hit us the other night, he was wishin' Kastner in the hot place."

Mount laughed again, not knowing how literally true his words were. But Snyder's murderous impulse certainly had more behind it than resentment at Kastner's overpersuasion.

"How did Kastner come in on this

expedition, anyway?" Tom asked. "He isn't really one of you."

"No, but he used to live in our neighborhood when he was a boy. Came back just about the time we was gettin' set to go. He let out he'd trapped in the Rockies and made this trail twice, besides fightin' in the Mexican War; and so, when he made up to join us, 'twas decided to make him captain. I was one that voted against him, but so far I admit he's run things real shipshape. Howsoever, we ain't across yet."

Tom put another question or so, but drew nothing more of interest. However, the conversation almost decided Tom concerning Snyder. Mount's opinion of Snyder jibed almost absolutely with Tom's; and unless both were wrong, Snyder couldn't be the man Tom was after. True, Snyder in the fury of battle had come close to killing Kastner; but it took a certain amount of cold courage to do the thing Tom had sworn to avenge.

Perhaps desire had something to do with building Tom's conviction of Snyder's harmlessness. Day by day, with a sort of inevitability that made nothing of her father's opposition or Kastner's intrusions, Myrtle and Tom grew together in friendship.

They were so unlike—that was it. Tom was slow of speech, and of action, too, save on occasions. And he had a great rude strength so sure of itself that it seldom hastened. Myrtle had swiftness, grace, talk, laughter, and beauty like a flower's. True, her humor was often clouded, her manner depressed; there seemed more on her mind than Kastner's attentions. But, whatever it was, she usually forgot it in Tom's presence. Youth magic, perhaps love magic, brightened her eyes and freed her mind to play scintillatingly against his, as water against a cliff.

And they were together a lot. By the regulations of the train the two wagons made common camp fire. Evening after evening, Snyder, his daughter, Mount and Tom gathered fuel and made the prairie fragrant with the rich smell of bacon and coffee. Afterward, till Kastner came, they would sit together in the dusk, the warm air pungent with wood smoke, the stars shining down, the night pricked with sharp stabs of flame from thirty flickering camp fires. It was a setting in which romance flowered fast.

One night there was a dance. Some one produced a violin, and the music of a waltz rose sweet and clear in the still air.

An expectant, half-embarrassed silence fell around all the fires. Tom hadn't danced much in his life, and looked hesitatingly at Myrtle, whose face was elfin in the ruddy glow of the wood fire. Near the center of the line a middle-aged couple led off. Then, with a clamorous shout, men fell to, and in a moment the fire was piled high with wood, and a broad space cleared around it.

"Git your pardners for a kerdrille," the fiddler shouted, and struck into rollicking, irresistible "Old Dan Tucker."

"Swing yer pardners, balance all;
Alamen left and a grand promenade."

Tom felt he couldn't dance, but he resolved to. He caught Myrtle's eye as Kastner came up. She nodded and ran with him, laughing, to where a square was forming. In a moment they were caught in a whirling, ordered eddy. Tom made mistakes, but not many. His height enabled him to keep track of the others, and Myrtle guided him and interpreted the calls.

"Ladies balance—*you* stand still.
Swing the corners—you swing *her*."

Something wild seemed to enter into all of them, and it became a dance of indomitables—of true pioneers. Be-

hind them were shallow graves and ahead unmeasured desolation; nothing was certain but hardship, but the joy of the moment filled them. Tom glimpsed Mount, who was in his element, cutting rude capers as he danced. But Tom's eyes were always full of Myrtle, who flitted through the figures like a sprite—laughing, flushed and breathless, hair in lustrous disorder, eyes brilliant with the very spirit of the dance.

But once he saw a shadow come over her face; and, looking for the cause, saw Kastner gazing somberly at her and Tom.

It troubled Tom for a moment, but not long. He was having too good a time. It was glorious to swing the girl from her feet and feel her happy in his arms. It was glorious to know that it was *he* with whom she wanted to dance, and to feel her hand, soft, warm and trustful, resting with girlish confidence in his.

The spell was too precious to end. When the last dance was over, when the fire had died to faintly glowing embers, and the camp had settled to silence broken only by the occasional lowing of an ox or the distant wail of a wolf, they still sat on an emptied freight box just outside the Snyder wagon. And the talk proceeded through idle, intimate nothings and silences until it came that they spoke of Kastner.

"I hate him!" Myrtle said.

"Then why——" began Tom. No need to complete that question.

"Oh, I wish I could tell you." Myrtle's voice was plaintively eager. "Maybe I dare, if——"

"If what? Myrtle! Anything I can do——"

"Well, if you'd tell me——" She laughed softly, shyly. "You see, we *don't* know anything about you. Only that——"

"I seemed to want a ride mighty bad. And I seemed to be running away from something."

"Ye-es!"

"And you want I should tell you?"

The girl didn't answer; and Tom, too, remained silent for a full minute. By then he had decided. Surely he could trust her. He wanted to trust her. He wanted her to know he wasn't just a runaway thief or tramp as eagerly as he desired to learn the secret of her attitude toward Kastner. As for her father, he quite forgot what small lingering doubts he had left.

"Well, I was running away, and I did want a ride, on this particular train."

"On this train! Why?"

"It's a secret, same as yours is, I suppose."

"Well, *I'll* never tell."

"Well, then——" Tom hesitated. "I'll have to begin by telling you how I got them burnt places on my clothes—by burning my way out of jail." Tom spoke almost in a whisper. No one must hear this.

"Oh! But you weren't——"

"No, I wasn't guilty. But I was in, just the same—for murder. I'd probably have been turned loose. It wasn't because I was afraid, that I broke out. I broke out because—well, I'll just tell you the story.

"I come from Jackson. Maybe you remember it—a little town about fifty miles east of Council Bluff. This train stopped there for a day to buy supplies and rest up. Well, I was living there with a man I called my father. Always lived with him, seemed like. My own father and mother were killed by Indians when they were emigrating out from Kentucky. I got away, some way, and this man picked me up from where I was hiding in the woods. 'Bout six years old, I was. And he took care of me from that time on. Been mighty good to me—couldn't have been better if I'd been his son. Only

lately we took to quarreling. I don't know why exactly. Only I was growing up and wanted my way more.

"Well, we talked it over sensible and decided we'd best split. I wanted to go away. And then he surprised me. He'd been putting away wages for me all the time and would give me money to go on. Took it out from under the floor of his shop where he'd been hiding money for years. It was a stone floor, because he was a blacksmith—— What's the matter, Myrtle?"

For Myrtle's body had stiffened suddenly. She relaxed instantly, with a little laugh.

"I thought something was crawling over my shoe," she said.

"Well," continued Tom, "he was working that same night he gave me the money—had some horses to shoe. And he was killed—clouted over the head from behind. But he fought after he was down. They struggled all over the floor. You could see that. Then I was arrested and put in the town jail. You see, they knew about us quarreling, and they found his money on me—two hundred dollars. Nobody knew he had lots more than that—maybe a thousand dollars more. He didn't trust banks, he always said, and there wasn't any nearer than Council Bluff, anyway. But people thought I had it all, and they was sure—— Gee, your hand's cold, Myrtle."

"The night's getting cold. Go on."

"Myrtle, if *your* father was killed, and you locked up for killing him, you wouldn't really be worrying much about yourself, would you? Well, I wasn't, either. It wasn't my neck I was thinking about, though it might have been in some danger. I was remembering that the real murderer was getting away all the time I was in that there jail. So I got some matches and tore up the corn-husk mattress they gave me. And 'twixt dark and daylight I burned a hole right through the jail. Got scorched a bit myself, but I was loose to take after this train."

"After this train?" Myrtle murmured.

It was odd that, though her voice was even enough, her body was trembling from head to feet. Tom stole a glance at her. Her head was bent, and her face looked ashen in the starlight. A vague uneasiness came to Tom, but he went on:

"Yes! I figured it out. 'Twasn't any of the neighbors. I knew them all too well to believe that. Besides, none of 'em was around the shop that day. The only strangers about was from this train. And he was shoeing horses from this train all day, and was working on one at night when he was killed. Some one from the train saw him go to the cache to get the money for me. Whoever it was probably thought that he'd take the money out when he left the shop that night, so he killed him while he worked. I'm sure it was that, and I'm a-going to find him."

Followed a moment of dead silence. Then the girl leaned against Tom and pressed his hand. Her voice was almost caressing.

"But you haven't anything to go on? You haven't any way to know him."

"Well, I'd know the money. And I've thought—a sign——"

Tom faltered, broke off. Something was wrong. He felt it, though he couldn't analyze it—except that the girl's voice was too soft, her manner too persuasive, when balanced against her evident very great agitation.

"Yes? A sign?" she repeated almost breathlessly.

"Well, maybe. I don't know about that. I only thought—rather not say till I know something sure."

Far rather had Tom that he had not said anything at all. The silence that followed was embarrassing to both, with the consciousness of a broken

confidence. Tom hoped it was merely that that brought the girl suddenly to her feet, with the plea that she was cold, and sent her with but the briefest "Good night!" to her wagon.

He hoped so, but he was sure that as she reached her wagon, he heard the sound of a sob. And she had been frightened, frightened—for whom?

What a fool he had been to tell her!

Tom crawled into his blankets and lay staring up into the vast hollow of the starlit sky. For the first time since he had joined the train, a great loneliness came to him. And, oddly, a feeling of danger, too—of intimate, imminent peril. It sprang from the knowledge that his secret was no longer his only, and that the man who had killed his foster father would certainly not pause at another murder.

He assured himself that the girl would not betray him. He could not believe it of her, and yet——

He drew the revolver with which he had been supplied and carefully examined it. Keeping it in his hand, he rolled over until his shoulder touched Mount's. Mount was instantly awake, and seemed to go as instantly to sleep again when Tom spoke. Thus guarded and on guard, Tom also slept, after some hours of troubled thought. And that was always the manner of his sleeping thereafter.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TOMAHAWK.

ALL this time the train moved on—a sluggish, reptilian advance. Yet there was the majesty of rude might, of a bold challenge to the untouched wilderness, in that slow, inevitable progress. And for most of the members of the train, these were big, hardy, brave and somehow restful days.

Past struggles and struggles to come receded beyond the far horizons. The present was enough. The immigrants' first excited eagerness softened into a vague content.

The days were all alike. Morning, afternoon, and night followed each other in smooth, tranquil order, steady as the rhythmic swing of a great pendulum. But slowly, as the caravan followed up the Platte, the character of the country changed, became less luxuriant, less friendly.

The grasses were different and sparser. On hilltops appeared the silver gray of the first wild sage. The little tributary streams dwindled became beds of dry sand. Oaks and elms were no more—only lines of cottonwood and willows. These became yellow and enfeebled. The air became more stimulating, the stars nearer. The train was ascending the great plateau, entering the country of the Sioux.

The Sioux, after their manner, made no secret that they were observing the progress of the intruders.

Many times, from a distant hilltop, a statuesque horseman watched the crawling train. For two days a band followed it, keeping always just within sight. The next day the same band or another approached at a gallop from the west, their right hands uplifted. There were about twenty warriors. The leader confabbed friendlily with Kastner, who used their own language. Meanwhile, the others rode slowly along the train, their narrow-lidded, restless eyes searching it from front to rear.

Not an item of loot nor a weapon of defense escaped them. Finishing, with a wild whoop they whirled off to the north.

At Kastner's orders, every man wore a full cartridge belt and kept rifle and revolver within reach at all times. Sentry duty was doubled, and sitting by camp fires after dark was prohibited. All fires must be out at dusk.

Tom was not sorry for that last.

There was no joy for him in camp-fire conversations now. So far from redeeming her half promise to confide in him, Myrtle Snyder had slowly and purposefully withdrawn her friendship from him, to bestow it in still greater measure on the man she had told him she hated.

That process began immediately after Tom had shared his secret with her. And it was no comfort to Tom that thereafter, day by day, the pallor deepened in her cheeks, and her eyes grew heavier with anxiety.

Anxiety for her father or for Kastner? Tom couldn't be sure, for she was with Kastner constantly. They rode together beside the train; they sat together in the evening—the efficient, thin-lipped train captain with the smoldering, smoky eyes, and the girl with the flowerlike face and mature, strong lips and forehead, upon whom fear grew daily. And her attitude toward Kastner had changed. She more than tolerated him now.

Was it fear for Kastner, whom, by all outward signs, she loved? Or instead, was it fear *of* Kastner? Tom wondered if Mount was right when he said one day:

"He's got some game, though the devil only knows what it is. She hates what she's doin', lad—you be sure of that."

Mount spoke consolingly, but it was small consolation. For if that were true, what could it mean but that Myrtle's father was the murderer whom Tom was seeking; that Kastner knew and could prove it, and that Myrtle herself was the price he demanded for silence?

That evening occurred an incident which still further confused Tom, but which proved that he was at least right in feeling his own life in danger.

Camp was made beside a small stream lined with cottonwood and underbrush. Eight sentries were posted, completely surrounding the camp, and to be relieved, as usual, at midnight. Tom was spreading his blankets when he was told by Kastner that he was to be one of the relief. Kastner assigned him his post: about two hundred yards west of the camp and on the same side of the stream.

Midnight found Tom taking his post. For perhaps two hours he sat there cross-legged in the tall grass, facing outward from the camp. His job was to watch the prairie in front for a mounted mass attack, and to listen for the slightest rustle in the underbrush to his left. Nothing happened. There was only the stirring of a plover in the cottonwood, the distant howl of a wolf, and the immemorial faint, far murmurs of the living earth.

A very still night, a night for sentries to nod. But Indians had been sighted again that day; and with them on his mind, and his own problems, too, Tom found wakefulness easy. Bolt upright, he sat, head and shoulders showing above the grass, nerves strung tight and every sense alert, until——

What was that?

A whisper of wind? A prowling weasel? A crawling snake? Something was stirring the grass. Tom's body remained motionless, his head turned. With bated breath he studied the grass toward the cottonwoods. His eyes caught the slightest wavering of the top of that grass—and then the wavering ceased.

With one movement, he faced around and threw his rifle forward to the aim.

Or, rather, he started to do it. At the same instant a naked arm swished up from the grass. A flung tomahawk traversed the space between with almost the swiftness of a bullet.

Tom was struck—he hardly knew where. The rifle fell from his grip.

He crumpled face down in the grass. But he did not quite lose consciousness. And his muscles acted automatically. He found his hand on the butt of his revolver. He withdrew it, and with a tremendous effort of the will writhed over on his side just as a knife ripped into his scalp.

The Indian had come for his trophy, his scalp lock!

Pain and horror revived Tom's strength. His arms came up. He discharged his revolver aimlessly. He thrust out above his head, thrust away the scalping hand. Then, somehow, he gripped the other. He had the Indian's knife arm pinned. He found that he was blinded by the blood that filled his eyes. But exultation replaced horror, for his strength had never failed him yet, and he knew he could hold the other. Then he found he could not.

He was still weak from the blow. His assailant was dragging himself away, out of Tom's embrace. Well, in that case——

Suddenly Tom released the other and heaved. He flung him away with all the strength of his long arm. Now, with the knife at a distance, up with the revolver! As Tom flung the weapon up, he brushed the blood from his eyes with his left sleeve. Now he could see, though dimly. He could see to shoot.

But the other was a mere leaping shadow in the night, by then, darting for the underbrush.

Tom got in two shots, but it was sheer luck if he had touched him. There was a rustling in the underbrush, then silence.

But from the camp was coming the sound of subdued voices and hurried movements. Already the men were falling into position for defense. And he could hear the other sentries retreating to the camp. He knew there would be no precipitate action, no rush to rescue him, for that would leave the wagons unprotected. So, without hailing the camp, he knelt in the grass, picked up his rifle, and fumbled around for the tomahawk.

He found the tomahawk, started to thrust it handle down into his belt, and then withdrew it with a low exclamation.

"Gosh!" he muttered.

He fingered the handle; then, bending low, examined the whole weapon as closely as the starlight permitted.

When he finished, his whole body was tense with a stronger emotion than the attack had aroused. His gray eyes had narrowed vengefully. His wide lips had curled in a very ugly grin. His angular, honest face was twisted with rage like a gargoyle's.

"Now who? Which? Lord, if I could only have seen!"

Then his rage passed, or perhaps only the expression of it. He threw himself down and began crawling swiftly toward the camp, which was now thoroughly aroused.

Halfway there he called out his identity, thrust up his rifle so it could be seen, and resumed his progress. Not for an instant did he expose himself above the grass. When he got inside the corral he was immediately surrounded by men.

"Just one of 'em, and he got away," he reported, keeping the blood from his eyes with a handkerchief. "No, I ain't much hurt. Just this cut"—he showed one on his forehead—"and another where he tried to scalp me. Where's Kastner?"

"Over there."

The man pointed to Kastner coming across from the opposite side of the barricade.

"He been here all the time?" questioned Tom hastily.

"I guess so. Why?"

"Oh, nothing," said Tom, and turned away to meet Kastner. Briefly

and a little boastfully, he reported what had happened.

"If I'd been able to see, I'd have got him sure. Got a souvenir, anyway"—he patted the tomahawk—"and you can just bet I'm keeping it. I may need it later on."

Kastner seemed to pause a moment before replying.

"Good work, Tom. You think there was only one of them?"

"Sure of it," said Tom decisively.

"Well now, you can't be sure," replied Kastner. "We'll keep the other sentries in and stay on guard. It's pretty near morning, anyway. You'd better get that cut fixed up."

"I was going to."

Tom started for his own wagon, and came face to face with Myrtle, descending from hers. She drew back, startled.

"Oh! You're hurt!" There was a nervous tremor in her voice.

"A bit." Tom paused. "Your father about?"

"Y-yes!"

"I've heard he was mighty good at fixing bandages. I wonder——"

"Oh, of course." But she seemed disturbed. "Daddy!" she called.

"All right! I'll be there," replied Snyder from within the wagon. His voice was louder than usual. There even seemed a touch of bravado in it.

Myrtle stirred uneasily.

"Poor daddy! It gave him a turn. His nerves are bad. And he's always worrying about me."

"That's natural," said Tom. Then he chanced a random shot. "Let's see. He was on guard, too, wasn't he?"

"Y-yes! That's why—he's so upset." Plainly Myrtle was upset, too. She turned with a start of relief as Snyder climbed down over the front wheel of the wagon.

"Oh, hello!" said Tom. "Good! You brought the stuff." Snyder had a bottle of brandy and some lint and cotton cloth in his hand. "Hope you don't mind——"

"Course not. You just let me swab that out."

He spoke loudly and with artificial heartiness. His breath and his thickened tones indicated that the half-emptied bottle had been full a few minutes before. His hands were so tremulous, and he bungled the job so badly that when it came to wrapping Tom's head, Myrtle intervened.

"Daddy's so clumsy. You'd better let me finish."

But she was clumsy and flurried, too, and more than ever after Tom put a question which he knew Snyder must answer truthfully—the facts being so easily verifiable by the other sentries.

"So you were on guard, too. Anywhere near the shooting, Mr. Snyder?"

Snyder seemed to swallow hard before he answered, as though he gulped down a lie that would not serve.

"Why, yes. I was just across the crick from you."

CHAPTER V.

MORE DANGERS THAN ONE.

"DO you see anything queer about this?" asked Tom.

He took the tomahawk from his belt and laid it across his knees. For an hour, while the train bumped and lurched over the roughest country yet, he had debated the question, studying Mount with sidewise glances, weighing his friendship and rough wisdom.

Mount glanced at it.

"No. Just a tomahawk."

"You sure?" questioned Tom disappointedly.

"Sure! Or, wait a minute. Seems like it looks familiar, at that."

"You just keep on looking at it, then."

"Why, Great Jehoshaphat! I know now. It's that chip broke off the hammer end of it."

"Well, what of that?" persisted Tom.

"Seems like I've seen one just like that before. Why, one of them we took off the Pawnees was chipped like that."

"*S-sh!* I don't want anybody hearing. Chipped like this, eh? Now, how many d'you suppose are drifting around, with chips out of 'em in that particular place?"

Mount was silent a long moment. He spat into the withered grass, and slowly his eyes traveled the curving length of the train ahead. Then he spoke almost tonelessly:

"Just what you gettin' at, lad?"

"There ain't two; and you know it. This tomahawk that was flung at me came out of our own train."

"But how could an Injun have got it?"

"I didn't say any had."

"Then what?"

"I'm telling you, Mount, and nobody else. Not now. I don't think 'twas an Indian that jumped me."

"But you saw him."

"No! That's just the trouble. I didn't see anything but the swing of his arm, and I couldn't tell the color of it. I thought 'twas an Indian's, of course. But it wasn't. It was somebody from this train."

"Better be careful, Tom."

"I'm going to be careful, all right. Now, you wait till I tell you something, and you'll see. I'll tell you how I came to be on this train in the first place."

Beginning with the murder of his foster father, Tom brought the tale down to the point where he had confided in Myrtle Snyder after the dance. Mount listened with widening eyes, said nothing till Tom paused.

"And you think she told somebody?" he questioned then, incredulously.

"Well——" Tom hesitated. It was the last thing in the world he wanted to think, and yet——

"Nobody could've heard us," he said miserably.

"But somebody found out," said Mount, "and that somebody tried to jump you. Yes, it looks that way. And from the flustered way she acted while she was listenin' to you——"

"But I didn't tell you that!" exclaimed Tom.

"No, but you've told it now," grinned Mount. "Upset, wasn't she? And maybe tryin' to pump you? Aye!" as Tom nodded reluctantly. "So the story concerned some man she was interested in. And there's only two. Now comes a pretty question: which of them does she care enough for to protect through murder guilt?"

"Her father!" said Tom sharply. And then he went on, though again reluctantly, to tell of Snyder's opportunity last night, and the agitated condition in which Tom had found him.

"Aye, aye!" said Mount sadly. "Looks bad, doesn't it? But his bein' on that post don't mean so much. Kastner could've jumped you and got into his shirt and back in camp before the rest of us turned out. And, somehow, I can't think of Snyder bein' that low-down and treacherous—any more than I can think of him havin' nerve enough to jump a husky country blacksmith all by——"

"Wait a bit. There's something I didn't want to tell you; but I guess I'd ought to."

And Tom related how he had seen Snyder on the point of shooting Kastner in the back the night of the Pawnee attack.

"Well, well! Now I wouldn't have believed that, either. So he hates Kastner that bad!" Mount whistled. "Yes, that was a low-down thing, too—even to think of. And yet he's throwin' Myrtle into Kastner's arms—I've seen a bit. And she makin' believe to

be willin'; and turnin' thumbs down on you ever since you told her. Let me think a minute."

For several minutes there was silence. Mechanically, Tom's eyes ranged over the low, ascending hills, interspersed with low and desolate plains, through which the train was climbing. Then, at very near the limit of his vision, he saw a column of smoke arise, dark against the blueness of the sky. Slowly it mounted, separating from its base, hanging black and ominous in the still air.

Tom nudged Mount's elbow, pointing.

"Look!"

Mount followed the pointing finger.

"Aye! 'Enemy in the country,' that means. Injuns signalin' on toward Laramie. We're just comin' to the real Injun country—Sioux, Cheyennes, Arapahoes and some more. I'm sort of glad we saw that."

"Why?"

"Well, it illustrates what I was thinkin' about. First off, though, take this jigsaw puzzle of ours. Here's the way of it. Where Kastner fits, Snyder don't; and where Snyder fits, Kastner's likewise out of it. Mightn't the answer be that they both belong?"

"Both!"

"Why not? Just think about it, and you'll find it'll explain a lot of things. Maybe it'll explain why you and Snyder were on adjoinin' posts last night. Kastner posted you both, you know. Just how they're both in it, I don't know; but I'm pretty sure they are. Now, *if* that's true, what do you think of the prospects of this train, with a thief and murderer as captain?"

"Hadn't thought of it much!" confessed Tom.

"Well, it'll bear thinkin' about, in connection with them Injun signals and the like. And consider that Kastner's trapped all over this country and knows the Injuns' lingo and likely some of their chiefs—and that there's plenty of loot in this here caravan to satisfy him and the Injuns, too. People ain't talkin' about it, but there's money in every wagon. We all sold our farms, you know, before we started out."

"Lord, you ain't meaning——" Tom's voice trailed off in sheer horror as he contemplated the possibility Mount's words suggested.

"I'm meanin' we've got to step wide and careful. Supposin' Kastner joined this outfit with the idea of betrayin' it. Or again, supposin' he didn't, but gets the idea that he's suspected of killin' your adopted dad, and that it ain't safe for him to go through where there are United States marshals and courts and things. Well, there are plenty of places ahead where you could make a road out of the bones of trains that didn't go through. And there'll be plenty of chances for Kastner to add our bones to 'em, savin' himself alive and with lots of profit, if he makes a deal with the Injuns."

"Well, what's to be done?" asked Tom.

"Finding out things is to be done. Findin' out things for certain. And dead-sure ways of provin' them. 'Cause there's another danger: the chance of a split-up—quarrelin' 'twixt ourselves. Lots of trains have gone to ruin that way. Take the Donner party. This train's pretty near sold for Kastner now, 'cause he's proved himself efficient. Try to throw him out as captain, and there'll be plenty of trouble."

"There's one thing," began Tom. "A sort of sign——" And then he paused. He had grown a bit unsure of himself and his deductions; and his conception of a brand marking the body of his foster-father's murder like the stigma of Cain, seemed now uncertain, even fantastic. But all the same, when the time came he would look for it. "Finding out things is what I joined this train to do," he said.

Mount hesitated a moment, apparently debating Tom's unfinished sentence. But when Tom showed no signs of explaining it, he went on:

"Well, you keep findin' 'em out your way, and look out for yourself meantime. Last night's happenin' is likely to repeat. As for me, I've got a plan that I ain't talkin' about right now. Reason is, I want to be able to say I'm workin' on my own. You won't know what I'm doin', but I will be workin', for this here train's sake as well as your own—and Myrtle's."

Tom was satisfied with that. He had really expected no active help from Mount. But during the week that followed, it became evident that Mount was busy along his own peculiar lines. If it had not been out of the question, considering Mount's personality, he would seem to have become Kastner's rival for the affections of Myrtle Snyder.

Whenever it was possible, he was with her. And Myrtle saw to it that it was often possible. He enlivened and cheered her. Under his bluff and friendly sorties of wit, her despondency often vanished. The guard she had seemed to set lately on all her talk and actions went down. The reason was, Tom thought, that with Mount she was continually forgetting the present for the past. Mount had known her since babyhood, and his talk and teasing stories ranged all the way over her life. Twice Tom caught a suggestion that Mount had been a suitor for her mother's hand, defeated by Snyder.

Plainly Mount was trying hard to gain her trust. Tom grew a bit angry with Mount at times, recoiling from that method of attack. It seemed a rather low trick, cajoling her into making a confidence which would be used against some one she would protect, even if that some one were Kastner—and even though Myrtle had cajoled Tom into revealing his secret, and then betrayed it.

Two others watched the little play with more than Tom's antagonism. Kastner was openly resentful. Snyder seemed sullenly suspicious. Then one evening it appeared that Snyder also came around to friendship.

Anyway, after the evening meal, Tom missed the three of them—Myrtle, Snyder and Mount—and, looking around, discovered them strolling toward a little gulch a few hundred yards west of the camp.

A few minutes later, Tom saw Kastner also walking with an air of carelessness in the same direction. "Eavesdropping?" questioned Tom to himself. And he rose and followed Kastner. He came upon Kastner in a listening attitude just within the line of bushes that edged the gulch. Tom stopped, but Kastner heard him and turned with a start.

"What you doing here?" demanded Kastner harshly.

"The same as you, I guess," drawled Tom peaceably.

"Meaning what?" Kastner's voice was unnaturally hoarse.

"Why, we're both just stretching our legs, ain't we?"

"Maybe!" Kastner approached Tom a few paces Tom saw that the muscles of his face were rigid and his fists clenched tight. It even seemed that the blood had receded from under his tanned skin. Plainly Kastner was furiously angry out of all proportion to Tom's offense. Yet Tom got a suggestin of fear, too. The next instant Kastner had controlled himself.

"It's all right"—again he was the train captain, authoritative, impersonal—"only this sashaying away from the train's got to stop. It isn't safe in this country—I've told you that before. That's what I came out here to see about. Hey, Snyder! Mount! Myrtle! Where are you, anyway?"

Their heads showed up above the underbrush not fifty feet distant; they had been sitting on the bank of the tiny stream. Politely, Kastner explained his search for them, and asked them to stay by the train. But later that night, Mount very anxiously inquired of Tom how long he thought Kastner had been standing where Tom had found him. He seemed a little relieved—not much—when told he could not have been more than a minute.

Probably Kastner had heard something of their talk. Now what was it, Tom wondered, that could have caused him to become so infuriated and—yes, afraid!

Mount explained nothing, but from that evening dated several changes. They were not surface changes—outwardly everything went on as before. Myrtle still kept company with Kastner; she still avoided Tom; but there was friendliness in her eyes when she looked at Tom, and sometimes a little more—a softness, perhaps a promise. And her look was no longer as worried as it had been.

Her father lost something of his look of fear; and Kastner had surly fits. Yet Tom had the feeling that they were all trying to act exactly as they had before, but that something so vital had occurred in the gulch that they could not repress some expression of it.

Coupled with these changes was still further change in the landscape. Desolation came almost stealthily upon it, as the trail led to ever and ever higher levels. Slowly the rolling plains gave way to bare plateaus, over which clouds of bitter alkali dust pursued each other all day. Under this dust, and coated with it, was nothing but gray sage, sparse and yellow grasses, matted patches of cactus and soapweed, shrunken and half dead with draft and heat. Upon this vegetation and upon bark stripped from the cottonwoods, the stock fed poorly and grew thin.

The train fed more meagerly, too. Deer, grouse, and turkey snipe and fish from the Platte had supplemented their rations before; but now for days they saw nothing but an occasional gaunt gray wolf, or a distant, wary big-horn sheep. The dwindling stream and the fear of Indians ended fishing; and the dead monotony which had come over the days after two months of travel was broken only by occasional thunderstorms, drenching the wagons with cloudbursts.

Men and women became irritable, their nerves drawn tight by the long passage, culminating in these discomforts. There were sharp words and several fights. Then at last a magic name began to be heard; and the tension relaxed, especially among the men.

"We're comin' to Fort Laramie."

Far-famed in those days was the old fort. Incessant carnival ruled there, fed by unfailing springs of drink. It was a place for the festive kicking up of heels, where all border men resorted and all trains paused to forget the hardships of the trail in a general loosening of conduct.

"A place for things to happen," said Mount the morning of the day of arrival. "Your business there'll be to watch Kastner."

"I'm kind of in the dark. Things seem to have been happening already," suggested Tom.

"Aye, they had, in a way," confessed Mount. "One thing that's happened is that I've took an oath of secrecy. If I hadn't, there wouldn't have been anything to be secret about. But I can tell you this: If Kastner's goin' to strike, he's due right now, and he ain't a-goin' to rattle beforehand. But he ain't invisible, so I'm relyin' on you—just keep your eyes on him."

Tom pondered.

"And what'll you be doing?"

"Me?" said Mount, smiling curiously. "Well, now, I'll be watchin' Snyder."

And with that Tom had to be content.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CACHE AND THE BRAND.

MOUNT'S decision to watch Snyder might mean much or little. A watcher may be either a spy or a guard. Tom chose to believe the latter. A man like Snyder might easily need protection both from himself and from others in roisterous Fort Laramie. Since Myrtle Snyder's softening toward him, Tom was more than ever anxious that her father should somehow be proved innocent of the murder of his foster father.

Anyway, the job assigned Tom was the one he wanted. Kastner was the man he wanted to keep in view.

"By gum! if he's a drinking man—well, I'm still thinking that brand of good luck's on somebody. Maybe I'll get a chance to look for it."

The train entered Fort Laramie in the middle of the afternoon. Above the town, on the edge of the timber along the Laramie River, they passed a nomad camp of hide tepees, where Cheyenne warriors, squaws and children were lounging. Very close was a "Cossack" post of three soldiers, plainly on guard over the camp.

A few hundred yards farther was the beginning of Fort Laramie's principal street, composed mainly of "shake" and adobe saloons. Here it was with difficulty that some of the sterner ones kept the train moving. Men alternated with each other with the ox-goads to rush into the saloons and back. Behind the bars, passing out whisky in tin dippers, or dealing cards at the gaming tables, were avidly friendly men, scum of all the human drift that had gathered and clung here since the fur days.

The street and the saloons themselves were crowded with hunters and trappers, emigrants and freighters, argonauts on their way to the gold fields or returning, and Indians of many unfriendly tribes who made armistice here to trade. Mingling with the crowd but not a part of it were more weather-beaten soldiers, worn with their hopeless task of policing a thousand miles of lawless frontier.

Pervaded with the tension and fever of anticipating relaxation, the train passed the low-walled fort and made camp on the wide, grassy bench on the river below. An hour later the camp was nearly deserted by the men. Snyder had gone, a febrile, eager look on his face, though Myrtle had seemed to protest against his going. Mount had sauntered off after him.

Kastner still remained, leisurely inspecting the wagons for needed repairs. Tom worked, hewing out a spare rear axle as his excuse for staying. Kastner was all over the camp, but Tom kept close watch on the road leading into town. Every now and then he could hear Kastner talking to some one.

Shortly before dark, however, he missed Kastner's voice. He made the circuit of the camp, but did not see him. Then Tom began to inquire for him, saying that he needed a file from the commissary wagon. A woman told him that she had seen Kastner a few minutes before, walking toward the river bed.

Tom looked in that direction, hesitating. The river was lined with willows, and Kastner had disappeared into them. Tom would find it hard to explain, if Kastner caught him following him again.

But Tom had promised Mount, and besides, it was growing dark. It was growing dark with unnatural rapidity, Tom realized then. Looking to the west, he saw the sun had settled be-

hind an opaque cloud, along the edges of which sheet lightning played. It was the invariable harbinger of the fiendishly swift and heavy mountain deluge. Surely Kastner, observing it, would hurry back to the train.

So Tom went back to his wagon and waited. But minutes passed, and Kastner did not appear. Very soon it would be too dark to see him, if he did.

"He must be doing something darn important," thought Tom uneasily. And at last he started after him.

By now the entire sky was covered with a mass of heavy, blue-black clouds. The wind had died to an oppressive calm, and there was a queer, moist chill in the air. Walking lightly, Tom entered the willows opposite the camp. They were a thin line of great trees with a heavy undergrowth, and beyond was a ten-foot drop into the river bed. But the river was shrunken now, and the edge of the bed was dry for perhaps a dozen feet from the bank.

Tom paused and listened. Kastner might be near, or he might have gone up or down the river. Then Tom heard a faint sound—a queer, scraping, slithering sound—from somewhere upstream.

Tom started in that direction. He had taken three cautious steps when the near darkness was broken by a broad, quivering sheet of light which overspread the whole sky. He stopped, huddled close to a tree; but during the hoarse, prolonged roar of thunder which followed, he darted forward rapidly. Again and again came the lightning and thunder, and under cover of the reverberations, Tom advanced.

During the intervals of silence he listened, and presently identified the sound as that of a man digging in loose sand.

Kastner was digging a hole. Now, why? Had he hidden something there when he was in this country before? Or was he hiding something now?

Presently the sound was drowned by the oncoming rush of the storm wind sweeping down from the northwest. For a minute it was merely a distant, surging roar; then it leaped with a sort of howling fury upon the close-packed willows, thrashing them about. Under cover of this, Tom moved on, and presently crept to the edge of the bank, lay down on the ground, and peered over.

Just then came a jagged bolt, an instantaneous deafening thunderclap, and then a swift succession of vivid lesser flashes and rolls of thunder. In the nearly continual glare, Tom saw Kastner bent under the overhanging roots of a giant willow a little farther upstream, busily digging in the sand of the river bed with a small, very short-handled shovel, which he might have carried from camp inside his shirt.

The wind increased to demoniac force, and the drumming of the approaching deluge could be heard. In a minute, Tom would be soaked to his skin. Halfway between him and Kastner, he perceived another shelter of overhanging roots and earth. Hurrying toward it, he scrambled down the bank, the noise of his movements entirely lost in the sound of the wind, the drumming of the rain, and the unbroken, deep-throated roar of the thunder.

A moment later, the driving downpour began, but the wind slanted it off toward the river, and Tom found himself lying dry and safe. And though the lightning was less continuous now and dimmed by the sheets of rain, he could still see Kastner from time to time.

In a minute or two, Kastner stopped digging. From the sand near his feet he picked up a small metal box, and dropped it into the hole.

Tom would have wagered his life on

what that box contained. He watched Kastner fill in the hole, level off the sand, and then settle down to wait for the storm to pass. Tom also waited. The rain slackened swiftly. With low, diminishing thunder growls, the storm swept away to the east.

Kastner got up, and with a last look at his work, climbed the bank. Tom waited till he was well out of the willows. Then he hurried over and began to dig furiously with his hands.

He found at the bottom of the hole a nearly waterproof tin box in which coffee had been packed. Opening it, he drew out what appeared to be a roll of oilcloth. But within the oilcloth was a roll of greasy bills. His hands trembled as he struck a match on a rock and examined the currency.

"Dad's money! By heavens, it is! Kastner's the man!"

He could not doubt it, for his foster father had mentioned the amount he had left after the division. This amount was the same. Furthermore, there was a certain torn bill which Tom recognized, having taken it from a customer a week before the murder.

"Kastner's the murderer, but how'll I prove it? How can I even prove that he buried this here? And why has he buried it?" Tom pondered.

He thought a moment, then replaced the money in the oilcloth, the oilcloth in the box, and the box in the hole. Filling it in, he smoothed off the surface as Kastner had done. Then he walked upstream a little way and returned cautiously by an indirect route to camp, mulling the matter over in his mind.

"Kastner's afraid," he decided. "Whatever Mount's been doing has scared him. Afraid of the soldiers here—afraid Mount'll have him arrested. But he ain't abandoning the money. And he ain't coming back for it clear from Oregon—months of travel, that'd be. By gravy, that means he ain't going through with us—or we ain't going through. Anyway, Kastner's the man, glory be!"

That was the main thing. Myrtle's father was mixed up in it, someway; but the man with the money was the murderer, Tom decided. Snyder would be cleared, the cloud lifted from Myrtle's mind, and the barrier between himself and Myrtle be wiped out. Kastner's action in hiding the money fitted in well with Mount's suspicion that he intended to betray the caravan. But that didn't matter now; Kastner must be found and accused. And again Tom's confidence revived that on Kastner's body would be found indelible evidence of his assassin's part in that struggle in the far-away blacksmith shop.

"Proof, that'll be, that nobody can explain away."

Kastner wasn't in camp. Tom followed into town. He found the crowd in the one main street increased by a pack train which had come in from California. Every one seemed drinking madly, relaxing from the stern morality of the trail in a sort of frenzy. Through door after door Tom peered into rooms packed with men who swore, mostly in good humor, as they jostled each other to get to the bars. Finally, in a place roomier than most, set at one side with rough-board card-tables, he discovered Snyder and Mount.

Snyder was standing at the bar. Mount was at the edge of a group around a dingy roulette wheel in the middle of the room. Mount had a tin cup of whisky in his hand, but it was still half full, and he was cold sober. He greeted Tom with a nod and a whisper which was lost to every one else in the wrangle of voices.

"Kastner was in here a minute ago. Why ain't you followin' him?"

"I lost him, but I found out something. Want to talk to you."

"Can't leave him"—nodding toward Snyder. "Drinkin' like a fish, he is. I was afraid that'd happen. Just you tell me, shortlike."

"Kastner buried dad's money. On the river bank. I dug it up. Put it back again."

"Eh?" Mount's ruddy face tensed. "That means he's fixin' to—— Say, we've got to keep track of him."

"I know. But I want you to come along. There's something I haven't told you—a way we can prove that murder against Kastner. Now we know he's the man, we can do it. There's men in the train—I've talked with 'em—that know how the murder happened, heard about it at Council Bluff. They know that dad was shoeing a horse when it happened, and that they found on his body——"

"Now, *that's* Kastner's work," interrupted Mount in a low voice. And Tom saw that Mount wasn't attending to him—that he was gazing fixedly over toward the bar, with a look almost of fear on his face.

Mount started in that direction, pushing through the crowd of men. Tom followed, and saw Snyder had fallen into a quarrel with a dark-faced, snaky-eyed man—some mixture of Indian and white blood. They were both talking at once, heads thrust close together. Snyder's face as furious from drink and anger as it had been the night of the Indian attack. There was a clear space around them, and men were still pressing back.

"You pushed me, you—— You're huntin' trouble," Snyder cried out shrilly, full of whisky courage.

Tom, looking over the heads of the crowd, saw what followed clearly. Snyder struck with his right hand, the breed with his left—but there was a knife in that left. The two blows collided, and the breed's blade was deflected a little as it plunged into Snyder's body. As Tom leaped forward, hurling men to right and left, the breed's right hand came up, armed with a revolver. Snyder toppled futilely back as the breed fired, his target being the oil lamp in the center of the bar. The crash of the revolver filled the room, as absolute darkness descended on it.

Followed a chaos of movement and cries, but Tom held to his direction, reached the bar, and groped along it till he found a fallen body. He knelt and was feeling for the wound when Snyder suddenly sat up. The next moment another lamp was lighted.

"Boys, he picked the fuss. He picked it," Snyder, partly sobered, was declaring with a mixture of anger and self-pity. "I never did anything. He tramped on my toes—he pushed me and——"

His shirt was soaked with blood around a vertical slit under his right shoulder. Tom stripped it down to his waist and was examining the wound when Mount came up.

"Hurt bad?" asked Mount, kneeling.

"Not much. It hit the bone."

"Reason is, I hit his arm," declared Snyder.

"Probably so," said Mount. "Turned his knife, or it'd slipped 'tween the ribs. I'll take care of him, Tom."

He started hurriedly to pull the shirt up, covering Snyder's body. Puzzled at the action, Tom resisted it.

"It ought to be bandaged," he said.

"Shirt's a bandage. Tie something over it. That's all." Mount's voice was curiously tense, insistent. "I'll take care of him. You know what you've got to do."

His look and manner was so peremptory that Tom yielded.

"All right," he said, getting up.

And he turned away, passing behind Snyder toward the door. So it was that, as he glanced back just as Mount replaced the shirt, he got a glimpse of

what Mount was so anxious to conceal —the brand of a horseshoe burned deep into Snyder's back. It was the "good-luck sign" that Tom had started out to find, for it had been burned in half a dozen places on his foster father's body, as he and his murderer had struggled together on the floor.

The murderer could not have escaped, Tom had thought; and he now realized with horror and no exultation, at the sight of that brand on the body of Myrtle's father, that he had been right. Kastner's possession of the money was merely evidence; this was irrefutable proof. This was the barrier that the recital of his story to Myrtle had erected between her and himself.

CHAPTER VII.

A VERY LONG WATCH.

TOM turned and drifted toward the door, knowing it was not the time to demand that Mount explain why he was shielding Snyder, concealing that telltale mark—or why Mount believed that Kastner was back of this attack on Snyder.

Kastner had probably discovered Snyder's guilt and exorted the money from him; but surely that damning brand on Snyder's body made any counter-accusation impossible. And if Myrtle was yielding to Kastner's attentions in order to protect her father, his death would end Kastner's advantage there. It was a puzzling problem, but would have to be considered later.

At the door, Tom met a corporal and private coming in to investigate the shooting. On the street he saw other soldiers bearing side arms. Accosting a pair of them, he learned they were on patrol duty. They told him that there were reports that some of the saloon keepers were selling the Indians whisky, and that the train from the California gold fields was spending money wildly. To be beforehand with possible trouble, all the availables in the garrison—about fifty—had been ordered out.

Indeed, the town was in turmoil.

Every saloon was packed. Outside of them stood men with tin cups in hand, and the very air of the street was laden with the fumes of drink and shaken with ribald singing and discordant clamor as the earlier jollity of the evening passed into wilder excitement. From fires down toward the river came the roaring laughter and loud talk of other boisterous groups. It was a rampage of strength, not of weakness—the world-old comradeship of hardy men stripping the harness from their work-worn passions and turning them loose to frolic.

Tom walked here and there, seeking Kastner. He had no idea where to look; but after a while he found him at the upper end of town in apparently earnest talk with an Indian.

Tom could not get near without being observed, so he stopped in the shadow of a building and waited.

Presently Kastner and the Indian turned to the east, following the road by which the train had entered the town. Tom followed at a safe distance. He was quite sure where they were going, even before they turned off the road to the north, toward the cluster of Cheyenne tepees.

The "Cossack" post was still in the road, but they passed it boldly. Tom, however, had to approach the camp unobserved. He left the road, dropped to hands and knees in the grass, and began to creep diagonally across the clearing, watching the while the progress of Kastner and the Indian.

Just to the left of the camp was a clump of brush. The couple disappeared behind this. After a minute the Indian reappeared and passed into the cluster of tepees. Kastner remained behind.

Tom crept on. Nearing the brush, he went full length in the grass, his long body slipping through it stealthily. Crawling around the edge of it, he discovered another tepee, which from its position apart from the others must be that of a chief. From it was coming indistinctly the sound of talking.

Now he hesitated. If Mount was right, what was going on in there might well spell doom to the train. But there was still no proof. His bare word that Kastner had conferred with a Cheyenne chief would mean nothing. But if he were caught eavesdroppjng, he would probably never carry even that bit of knowledge back to the train.

He remembered the soldiers in the road. Then, drawing his revolver, he crept on to the side of the tepee. Lying face downward, he pressed his ear to the wall of buffalo hide. To get closer, he removed his broad-brimmed hat and placed it on the ground.

An Indian was talking in a semi-oratorical fashion. Knowing some Pawnee, a language similar to Cheyenne, Tom caught a few phrases:

"One sun—darkness—my wise brother—way open—great killing—paleface money, paleface squaw—my young men have many ponies, many guns."

These came in the course of a long speech, most of which Tom could not ever hear distinctly. But he could fill in the gaps terrifying well.

Still he lingered. He wanted to hear Kastner talk. All he knew now was that to-morrow night the train was to be attacked, and the spoil divided. Perhaps Kasnter would intermix enough English in his speech to give Tom the details of his plan. But before Kastner spoke, Tom became aware that an Indian was standing over him.

The Indian had a tomahawk half raised. Tom's finger tightened on the trigger of his revolver. Perhaps it was because the Indian saw this that he made no move to strike.

"Wagh!" he grunted, and motioned with his tomahawk for Tom to stand.

Tom obeyed. He dared not raise his revolver, but he pointed to it significantly with his left hand, flexed and unflexed his trigger finger, and jerked his head toward the road where the soldiers were stationed.

The Indian seemed to understand. He grunted acquiescently, and gestured with his tomahawk toward the front of the tepee.

Tom backed in that direction, facing the Indian, and considering his chance of escape. Before he could get his gun up and fire, the Indian could probably dispatch him with the tomahawk. Behind Tom was the whole Cheyenne encampment; and some one, probably aroused by the Indian's ejaculations, was moving inside the tepee.

Indeed, Tom had just retreated past the entrance when the flaps parted and Kastner stepped out. And for a moment stood there as though paralyzed by the sight of Tom, who was now swaying drunkenly on his feet.

" 'Lo, Kast'er," said Tom thickly.

Kastner shot a few words at the Indian, who replied briefly. Then Kastner laughed shortly and angrily.

"Listening, eh? Spying on me again. Well, I guess this time——"

"Spyin' nothin'!" interrupted Tom, trying to speak in maudlin fashion. "An Indian stole my knife from where I laid it down when I was workin' on the axle. I thought I saw him go in this tent."

"Humph! Been following him ever since?"

"No. He got away. But I saw him in town again and trailed him out."

"That's likely! Why didn't you jump him there?"

"Ain't jumpin' no Indians—not me! Wanted to find out where he went and

then tell the soldiers. What d'ye think the soldiers are here for?"

"Not to hunt up jackknives. And you play a damn poor drunk."

Suddenly he spoke sharply in Cheyenne to the Indian. Tom caught the word "kill;" but he had already broken in swiftly:

"Lemme fire this gun once, and you'll soon find out what they're here for."

The Indian was drawing back his weapon, and Tom's finger was squeezing the trigger. Kastner cried out something, and the Indian held his blow. Kastner regarded Tom fixedly for a moment.

"Where's your hat?" he asked.

"Left it on the ground where I was listenin'," Tom told him, wondering at a certain curious interest that had come into Kastner's tone.

"Well, come into the tent," said Kastner shortly.

Tom decided to obey. Outside, he could too easily be dispatched by an arrow or tomahawk from the rear. But he insisted drunkenly that Kastner precede him, so though the Indian was at his rear, his own revolver was at Kastner's back. And when he entered, he stepped quickly to the left side of the tent, so he could watch both the occupants and the entrance.

The tent was lighted by several trade candles. Leaning against the central post was a shield, a quiver full of arrows, a lance and a bow. Hanging upon it was a wampum medicine bag, ornamented with beads and porcupine quills. Upon a mat at the other end of the tent sat a middle-aged Indian with a deerskin robe carelessly draped about his upper body. His head was shaved save for a scalp lock, and his features were fierce and cunning. He wore leggings of cowhide, fearfully fringed from the gartered knees to the bottoms of his moccasins with the hair of Pawnee scalps. To his right stood a very tall, nearly naked young warrior with a tomahawk in his hand and a knife thrust into the belt which supported his breechclout.

The seated Indian, unquestionably the chief, greeted Tom with a steady, reptilian stare. Kastner squatted on the floor, facing him, and addressed him in Cheyenne for perhaps a minute.

Tom followed with difficulty, but gathered that Kastner was pointing out that he could not be killed quickly enough to prevent him from firing his revolver, and that the report would surely bring the soldiers.

The chief flared angrily, talking rapidly, evidently declaring that Tom could not be left alive with the knowledge he had presumably gained.

But Kastner moved closer and argued with him in a low voice, apparently urging some alternative plan. In the middle of it, Tom broke in:

"Might as well tell you this, too—I ain't leaving here, either, and nobody's to lay a hand on me."

No one paid any attention to him. But it appeared that what he suggested was no part of Kastner's plan. After Kastner finished, the chief sat in dignified silence for a minute. Then he slowly rose, motioned the two warriors to the side of the tent opposite Tom, went close to them, and muttered some instructions of which Tom could not hear a word.

The chief then turned, stripped his equipment from the pole, and left the tepee. Kastner followed him. Tom was left facing the two warriors, with the width of the tent between them. With some wonder, Tom heard Kastner's heavy footsteps pass around the tent to the point where Tom had left his hat. After pausing as though to pick it up, he left.

The Indians held their tomahawks half raised, resting against their chests, handy for a throw. Tom's hand, with the revolver in it, swung

at his side. Tom knew that if he raised his gun, he invited death from the tomahawks; the Indians knew that a tomahawk fling would probably bring death to one of them, at least, from his gun, and that the report would draw the soldiers. Tom stood far enough away from the hide wall that he could hardly be killed by a lance thrust through it, and in a position so he could watch the tepee entrance.

It was such an impasse as Tom had heard of once before, when Boone and three Indians had watched each other while the sun passed from horizon to horizon. When darkness came, Boone had got away. Darkness would not come to this tent until the next day had passed, and that would be too late for Tom's escape to do any good to the train.

Perhaps half an hour passed. Then a general subdued stirring outside informed Tom that the rest of the Cheyennes were tearing down the tepees, breaking camp. A very few minutes accomplished that, and Tom heard the trampling of ponies and of people afoot as warriors, squaws and children withdrew through he woods to ford the river beyond.

The plan was plain. This remaining tepee, screened by the underbrush, would never be noticed by the "Cossack" guard, which would be withdrawn in the morning or possibly sooner. He would be left in it to be killed by his guard whenever his nerve broke or his watchfulness relaxed. Meanwhile the Cheyennes would establish another camp, from which their warriors would ride the following night to fulfill their bargain with Kastner.

Or was that the whole plan? The more Tom considered it, the more likely it seemed that there was more to it than that.

"Gives me a bit of a chance. Besides, if only these two are to watch me, their place'd be over by the flaps, 'cause it's through them I'd be getting away. Wonder if they want to keep my eyes off them flaps? Wonder if something's coming through 'em at me?"

So Tom, trying not to appear to do so, kept always the tail of his eye on the closed flaps. And at the same time racked his brain for a trick, a stunt, that would break the stalemate in the tent.

He thought that if the ordeal lasted long enough, he might feign a collapse, a fainting fit. But he realized that, though it might throw the Indians off guard for an instant, it would be more likely to draw their tomahawks. He thought of talking to them, trying to cajole them; but while they talked, their attention would be on him, and what was needed was a way to divert it. He thought of the trick of directing his eyes suddenly and joyfully over their shoulders, as though he saw help coming, in hopes they would turn their heads. But back of them was nothing but the opaque wall of the tepee, and Indians have steady nerves.

Meanwhile the slow minutes dragged into hours. The faint sounds of carousal in town died away. The "Cossack" guard quit its post and marched up the road. And the night passed.

The Indians' fixed stares began to have a hypnotic effect, or perhaps it was the fixedness of Tom's own gaze that affected them. He wavered on his feet. His thoughts became confused. His eyes grew strained and tired.

He rested his eyes by closing first one, then the other. The Indians grinned at this. His right hand grew cramped from holding his revolver, and he shifted it to his left. Very soon he shifted it back again.

The candles paled at last as dim light entered through an opening at the apex of the tepee and tiny crevices

between the hides. Vigilance became ever and ever harder to maintain, while Tom fortified his endurance with thoughts of the train, and particularly of Myrtle Snyder.

When his senses reeled, he steadied them by recalling the Cheyenne chief's words. "Paleface money and paleface squaw" were to go to his "wise brother"—to the renegade Kastner.

By now the train was already on the march toward the camp which it had been planned should be its last. And here he was, doing nothing, while the line of light that entered the top of the tepee crept slowly across it.

There was a reason why he was waiting. He had an idea, a hope. He still believed that the Cheyenne chief had arranged to have him killed as soon as his band had got so far away that they couldn't well be pursued. He believed that it was from without the tepee, between the flaps, that the blow was planned to be delivered. And he was waiting for the man who was to deliver it.

"These two are waiting for him, too. And they're just as tired as I am. I'm their job now, but then I'll be his. And maybe there'll be a second I'll be nobody's job. That's all I need—a second or two."

So, without betraying it, he kept his ears tuned for the slightest movement outside the tepee, and his eyes alert for the slightest movement of the flaps.

And so, at the same instant as did his guards, he heard something touch the front of the tepee ever so slightly. But, unlike them, he gave no sign.

They relaxed, visibly. And when the flaps parted ever so little, and the iron point of an arrow slipped through, they relinquished their responsibility. There was no change in their bodily attitudes, but they did just that. They passed their job on to the invisible archer just a moment too soon. Their eyes remained on Tom, but their attention wavered, for they were very tired.

That was why Tom, moving like lightning, had time to send a bullet past the arrowhead into the chest of the warrior outside, and, leaping forward, to thumb up his hammer and fire another shot before the tomahawks were hurled.

Then they missed him, because his spring forward was as unexpected as his shot. His natural line of flight was toward the tepee entrance. Reacting from one unexpectedness, they were confronted with another, and the adjustment took seconds. The tall Indian died with a bullet through his brain before those seconds had passed.

Tom swerved to the right as he fired, checked himself and sprang backward—instant movements undelayed by thought, for he had taken thought beforehand. So he escaped the knife thrust of the remaining Indian, and almost escaped the knife fling, but not quite. Just as Tom pulled the trigger on another point-blank shot, the knife left the Indian's hand, driving deep into Tom's leg between knee and thigh.

To withdraw the knife, run outside, assure himself that the archer was dying, then to bandage the wound with cloth torn from his shirt, took but a few minutes. Now to Fort Laramie and the troops.

Rather, to Fort Laramie and an interview with the commanding officer, wherein to tell of Kastner's perfidy and the reason for it, Snyder's crime, and all other relevant details. They might as well be told now, for they were all dovetailed, and in the investigation that would follow rescue by the troops, everything would surely come out.

And so Tom's purpose would be accomplished at last. He would deliver to justice his foster father's murderer, who was the father of Myrtle Snyder.

He did not debate the question. It was not a matter for debate. The desire for vengeance is an emotion purely, and during the last few weeks a stronger emotion had been revealed to Tom. It had control of him now. He looked for his hat, was not surprised to find it gone, and turned toward the woods.

At a little distance from the tepee, he stopped. His wound was bleeding freely, so he twisted the bandage tight with a stick. Then he went to the edge of the underbrush, peered around and listened intently.

His ear caught the near-by stamping of a fly-troubled beast. Following the sound, he found the mounts of the three Indians.

A moment, and two released ponies were flying from his blows through the woods. Five minutes later, mounted on the third pony, Tom was fording the Laramie River, with the Great Salt Lake Trail ahead of him again.

To save the train, he needed only to warn it. Mount would believe him, and everybody had confidence in Mount. They would spend the night on guard, and the only result of the frustrated Indian attack would be to prove his story of Kastner's treachery. Kastner would be revealed for the fiend he was, and whatever hold he had over the Snyders would be broken by his downfall.

So Tom would have been happy as he galloped westward, had it not been that the barrier of her father's crime still existed—and, it seemed, must always exist—between Myrtle and himself. Depression grew upon him as he considered that.

But in a few hours it gave way before a more pressing anxiety. For this country west of Fort Laramie was different from any yet encountered—a land of stones and hard-packed surface over which trains might travel anywhere. They had consequently traveled everywhere, seeking shorter routes. Faint wagon marks led off every little distance from the main trail, which was itself so ill-defined that it was hard to follow.

No telling where Kastner, planning ambush, had led the train. And to add to Tom's uncertainty that he would ever find it, came wooded gulches running east and west, obstructing the view—and a thousand lesser obstructions in the form of curious rock shapes rising from the bare plateau.

He rode hard and fast until he knew he had passed beyond the crawling train. Then he zigzagged back, fruitlessly, to turn again on a long loop to the north. The sun settled fast, and so its setting found him, scurrying about aimlessly in that empty world, that acme of desolation, in almost hopeless search for the betrayed train.

CHAPTER VIII.

CATASTROPHE.

THE train, led by Kastner over a supposed short cut to the south, was that moment settling gratefully to rest in an ideal camping place selected by him.

There was water, for a little creek wended southward a stone's throw away. There was shelter from the cold night wind, for a high barrier of rocks extended almost all around the camp. In the bottom of the amphitheater thus formed was grass for the stock. And guard duty would be light, for the encircling cliffs were so bare and precipitous as almost to forbid approach. Only to the south the creek and trail fell steeply away through a narrow defile, and to the north was an easy, wide approach between the hills.

A single sentry to the north and to the south seemed all that were required, but Kastner cautiously posted

two others. These were sent to the east and west into the hills. The remainder of the men were very soon asleep, most of them very gladly after that wild Laramie night.

Only Mount remained awake—and Kastner.

Mount was troubled. Outwardly he agreed to the opinion expressed by the majority concerning Tom's disappearance. Either he had deserted voluntarily to join the hangers-on at Fort Laramie, or he had been killed in a drunken brawl. But Mount knew neither explanation was true. He did not doubt that Kastner had a hand in the matter somehow. And night found him restless with the added conviction that if treachery to the train had been planned at Fort Laramie, this was the probable time for it to happen.

So he did not think of sleeping. And shortly after silence had settled over the train, he stole out of camp.

First on hands and knees, then full length, he crept along the creek bed to the north. Moving carefully, it took him half an hour to reach the opening between the cliffs. So silent was he that the sentry, posted in the middle of that opening, did not observe his approach.

Mount climbed the bank and settled down behind a bush. There was about fifty yards of clear space between him and the sentry, who was seated behind a low rock. Facing outward, looking over that rock, he could sweep the whole landscape beyond.

It was a dark night for the mountain country—no moon, and a veil over the stars. But it did not seem that anything could come toward that post unobserved. Nor did anything come upon it. Something was already there. For after a vigilant hour, Mount, glancing at the motionless sentry, caught the slightest vague stirring at the base of the rock to his right.

It was nothing but a shifting dark blotch against the rock, moving so silently that the sentry heard nothing. But its meaning was plain. Mount knew that death crept there in the person of an Indian.

And he knew, as his rifle steadied to the aim, that the Indian had been placed there by collusion between Kastner and the enemy—had been hiding in some crevice at the other end of the rock even when the sentry had taken his prearranged post.

Mount squinted along the rifle barrel to a very difficult target, hardly to be distinguished from the rock. Then that difficulty was remedied, for the moving blotch erected itself into the figure of an Indian with upflung tomahawk. Supporting himself on one hand, he was ready to deliver the blow when Mount's rifle crashed.

The report awoke echoes from the hills. It awoke the sentry from fancied security, too, and he leaped up with a cry. The Indian came up with a louder death yell, and struck furiously at the sentry. But he tottered even as he struck, and the affrighted sentry, springing back from the blow, finished his unpleasant visitor with another rifle shot.

Mount had already started for camp on the run, yelling back at the sentry:

"More comin'. You come in."

But as to that, Mount wasn't sure. They had expected to make a complete surprise, and now the surprise wasn't complete. They had expected to creep in and butcher the train while it slept; but if they were already massed for the attack, they might figure they had advantage enough. And Mount hoped they would come. It would stiffen the accusation he intended to make against Kastner, whether they came or not.

Mount rushed into the inclosure, shaking and kicking the prone bodies of the men, and calling out, "Injuns! Injuns!" But his fury mounted with suppression, and when he reached the

wagon where Kastner slept, he thrust in an angrily investigative hand.

"Come out of there, you——"

But not until he heard himself speaking did he realize that he would have to have it out with Kastner now, Indians or no Indians.

And then he was afraid he wouldn't, for the wagon was empty. He drew back into the inclosure, now milling with men automatically falling to preparations for defense, and began calling loudly:

"Kastner! Kastner! Who's seen Kastner?"

Nobody had seen him, it appeared. But nobody except Mount was seriously concerned; they were too busy filling in the spaces between the wheels with freight boxes and driving in the stock. He was somewhere around, they kept telling Mount, until he finally blurted out with curses his growing conviction that they would never see Kastner again.

"He's sold us out to the Injuns, damn his hide, and now he's gone over to them."

With that, he fell to work himself. There was no time for explanations now. But those who had heard him began to question each other whether Mount had gone insane, and where *was* Kastner. Nowhere, it appeared. And then in the middle of the ordered, nearly silent activities came knowledge of another absentee. Snyder's shrill, fear-filled voice was heard calling loudly:

"Myrtle! Myrtle! Myrtle!"

Mount dropped his work and hurried over. He seized the frantic father by his shoulder and questioned him tensely.

"She's gone? Where was she?"

"Asleep in the wagon, I thought. I was sleepin' on the ground here. But ——" He flung up his hands hopelessly.

"Kastner!" said Mount grimly. "But it beats the dickens! How did he get away with her, anyway? Couldn't have carried her out of camp."

"I don't know. She was here, 'n' he was here, right after sunset."

"And she wouldn't leave camp with him, after what we told her. She wouldn't, and yet—— Snyder, we held our fire a bit too long on that devil; but there's nothing to do now."

Mount turned away to take his place in the line.

At that moment there was passed the word, "Here they come!" as a compact body of Cheyennes, fiercest of mountain warriors, swept in absolute silence, save for beating hoofs, down upon the train. Except for the silence it was a repetition of the Pawnee charge, only their numbers were greater; but just as they neared the point where they might expect fire to break from the barricade, they split into two equal parties which wheeled to right and left in a mad rush for the unguarded rear.

Part of the defenders tore across the barricade, but in the confusion which the unexpected always brings to leaderless men. These men were not only leaderless, but had the knowledge that the mind, if not the body, of the man who had been their leader was helping the enemy—had betrayed to the enemy their weaknesses. They fought with the more fury for that, but with less confidence, as the onslaught of the Indians began.

The night became hideous with the smashing reports of shotguns, the rattle of rifles and revolvers, curses and wild whoops and yells. The turmoil drifted with the east wind for many miles over the silent plain until it came to the ears of a solitary rider, gaunter than ever of features and frame, slowly ascending a rise.

Tired, hungry and discouraged, Tom was still continuing his search. Now

he knew it was ended. He had come upon the train too late.

He did not doubt that he was listening to its last wild flurry. His almost ugly face contorted oddly as he pictured it caught in whatever trap Kastner had devised, perishing beneath the blows the Cheyennes were delivering. It seemed to grow visibly leaner as he thought of Myrtle struggling in a viler trap, for which he feared his own hat, taken by Kastner, had been the bait.

He changed neither the course nor the speed of the pony. The former was correct, and no speed would enable him to help the train. Indeed, within two minutes the flurry of sound completely died away. Whatever was done was done, and Tom had little doubt of what had happened. Now he veered to the right a little, ascending at a sharp trot the tallest near-by rise.

He left his pony tethered to a rock a little down the western slope and proceeded on foot to the summit. Lying prone, he dragged himself over the peak of it and lay there for perhaps ten minutes. Though the night was dark with a high mist, the lower air was clear, and so Tom was presently able to see a close-riding body of horsemen crossing the bleached plain on a course which would take them far to the south of his position.

Tom studied them a while. It did not seem that they were driving any stock nor leading riderless ponies. But that meant nothing, for stolen stock would probably be driven by a few warriors to concealment far from their village.

Tom sighed involuntarily. The sound was caused by an actual collapse of his chest, for he was very tired. Then he roused himself to study the country behind him and to the south.

It was a land of smoothly rounded hills, of eroded valleys with great resistant-rock formations still thrusting up, the valleys deepening in some cases into wooded gulches. From the western foot of the hill on which Tom was perched, one of these gulches led southward.

Again Tom studied the direction of the horsemen. It seemed certain they would pass through that gulch. He tried to estimate the spot where they would enter it. Then he slipped backward over the crest, arose and hurried to his pony, and rode down the hill to the beginning of the gulch.

Nature was penurious in this land. The willows and cottonwoods were dwarfed and straggling, and the underbrush was thin. Tom rode through it without difficulty. Presently it thickened a little, and, seeking the reason for it, Tom heard the slight trickle of a spring.

He dismounted, tied his pony, and made his way to it. Kneeling, he drank deeply. Then he dug into the ground beneath the spring and found it unexpectedly soft. There was mud here—deep, black, sticky mud. Tom drew out a handful.

CHAPTER IX.

NIGHT RIDING.

ALL things have their limits, including horror. Pile terror upon terror, and numbness comes—and sometimes, after numbness, another gift. Myrtle, lured from the camp by Kastner, gagged and dragged away to a distance, held there during the attack on the train—the ending of which she could only guess—and now borne away in the midst of a savage troop on a pony led by a worse savage—so treated, Myrtle had all the look of complete prostration.

Her body was slumped forward from the waist, her head and shoulders were bowed, and she swayed limply to the movements of her mount. But though that attitude had been at first

the result of collapse, its continuance was voluntary. From the extreme of horror, she had passed into a desperate calm and cunning, and pretending helplessness, she was continually searching with secret sidewise glances for a chance of escape.

All around her were dusky horsemen riding in taciturn silence. Through the darkness, she could see that some were lying along their ponies' backs, wounded. Some were tied to their mounts. Over three ponies that she could see, dead bodies were bound. Always Kastner rode ahead of her, her lead line in his hand, his head never turning.

Kastner was the only one whose position was constant. The others, though keeping in a compact body, shifted like swallows in flight. There was no hope in that, of course, but, like a trapped animal, she kept watching for breaks in the ghostly, noiseless cavalcade and glimpses of the dark plain beyond.

Thus it was that she came to notice one nearly naked warrior who seemed to always ride near her. She picked him out because, though he rode leaning forward weakly as though wounded, his body seemed larger than the others. After a while he pressed so close that his knee touched hers, and glancing down in instinctive recoil, she saw that his feet were encased in short boots instead of moccasins.

They might be loot from the train, of course; but thereafter she watched him closely. Slowly an obscure attraction, quite apart from the matter of the boots, kindled into an incredible hope. His body was bare, save for some sort of breechclout; his skin was fully as dark as the others'; and there were others of the wounded who, like him, seemed to have lost their weapons in the fight. But there was something different about him, and—Myrtle strained her eyes in the darkness—yes, there was more than a scalp lock of hair upon his head.

From that moment she knew him, and knew, too, that he had somehow joined the band in the wooded gulch not far behind. How he had come to be in that gulch passed her imagination, but it didn't matter. When he pressed close to her again, she lifted her bound hands slightly, and when the faintest whisper of "Myrtle!" came to her, she nodded recognition.

His pony stumbled against hers from a hard knee pressure, and his right hand darted out. If any of the Indians observed it, they might think he was pushing her pony away. But his hand pressed hers, and a knife cut through the deerskin thongs. He withdrew swiftly, bringing his own hands together, and she caught the hint and interlaced her fingers as the thongs fell off.

But what now? She was trembling and was feverish with sudden hope, but she steadied herself to realize it was nearly groundless. In spite of her knowledge that she should not do so—that every glance between them increased the danger of detection—she looked over to Tom for guidance. And, mingling with the rumble of beating hoofs, she thought she caught the one word:

"Wait!"

Then she saw his body straighten convulsively, as though gripped by an insufferable pain. It was a dangerous move, for when sitting upright he was head and shoulders above the Indians. But that gave him the advantage of being able to look over their heads and sweep the plain beyond.

Myrtle observed his gaze grow fixed. She tried to follow his look, but was so hemmed in by horsemen that she could not.

She was still looking outward when she heard a sharp ejaculation near Tom. She turned in time to see an

Indian on the other side of Tom leaning toward him, closely scrutinizing him, at the same time speaking to him in a rapid, questioning tone.

Tom did not turn. That would have been a waste of time. The only possibly profitable answer to the Indian's suspicions was action. With a very explosion of movement, he bent sideways and slashed down with his knife at the lead line of Myrtle's pony, close to the bit. As his hand came back, it struck the side of the pony's head, so that it whirled outward. Myrtle, having neither reins nor whip, drummed on the pony's sides with her heels. Panic-stricken, the animal bolted through the loose formation to its right, nearly throwing Myrtle as it caromed against the other ponies.

The next instant she was being borne at an uncontrolled gallop over the prairie. Riding bareback, she could hardly keep her seat, but she pounded the pony with her hands to increase its speed.

Tom was close behind her, having got away almost as soon. Quite a little way behind him the dusky pursuit strung out; for it had taken the others at least half a minute to realize what had happened. A few shots sounded, but it was impossible to aim accurately and any hits would have been chance ones. Besides, it was quite plain to the pursuers that it was impossible for the fugitives to escape.

It was plain to Tom, too. Myrtle's pony would soon run itself out; and besides, she had no way of guiding it to a straight flight. His own overworked mount was already faltering. He had a cartridge belt about his hips, and his revolver was thrust into what remained of his trousers; but if he stopped to make a stand it would not help Myrtle any. A few of the warriors would engage him, and the rest would ride after her.

Things had worked out wrong. He had seen a chance, but he had lost it. If he had been able to cut Myrtle's lead line long enough and throw the end to her, she might have used it like a rein. She might have been able to guide her pony toward a certain pinnacle of rock, like a citadel of refuge, toward which he had been staring when the Indian had discovered his disguise.

If they could have reached it, they might just possibly have been able to fight the Indians into a state of discouragement.

Despairingly, Tom watched the flying figure ahead, and listened to the thunder of hoofs behind. Then—glory be! What was Myrtle doing?

She was demonstrating horsemanship and something more. Leaning forward along the neck of her runaway mount, she was forcing its head around to the right by repeated blows of her fist. She was directing its course, by the only means she had, toward the only possible refuge visible on the dark landscape.

Thrilling with fresh hope, Tom reined his own beast around. The foremost of the pursuit discovered the altered course, and it became a race for the upthrust finger of rock.

It was hardly more than that—a stubby, upturned finger thirty feet high. Tom's mind raced with speculations as they neared it. Would they be able to climb it? Would they be able to defend it? Would Myrtle, unable to check her racing pony, have courage enough to fling herself from its back, and luck enough to rise after the fall?

She was still a little ahead of him. She would pass close to the rock. No, by all that was glorious, she would not pass it at all! She was heading her pony right onto it! Came a moment when the pony, seeing the obstacle in front of it, slackened its pace and then set its forefeet hard.

Partly leaping and partly thrown,

Myrtle hurtled to the ground and fell full length.

But before Tom's heart had time to skip many beats, she was up again and running to the base of the rock. She disappeared around the corner of it, and there Tom found her clambering up an all-too-easy ascent.

Tom had hoped for finger-and-toe holds only, but the rock on this side had crumbled and fallen away to a steep heap of loose fragments—a triangular heap, narrowing sharply toward the top, which slid away under their feet and sent disturbed rocks rolling down upon them. It was dangerous and difficult to climb, in a way—but not dangerous nor difficult enough.

"If there's another place like this, we're done for," thought Tom, as he drew Myrtle over the edge of the rock at the top.

And then Tom, who for the last few minutes had felt himself growing steadily weaker, felt they were done for anyway, for with a sudden, surprising collapse of all his powers, he went face downward on the nearly level summit.

Exhaustion was a partial cause. He had done too much, been without sleep or rest, and under strain, too long. But the immediately disastrous thing was this: the bandage about his leg had been shifted during the hard ride, the knife wound in his leg had reopened, and what remained of his strength had drained from him with his blood.

CHAPTER X.

SPRINGS OF STRENGTH.

"THEY'RE coming," whispered Myrtle a few minutes later.

"What—oh, yes!" Tom had actually to recall himself to the situation. For a while he had seemed vaguely and bodilessly drifting upon the margin of nothingness. But Myrtle had stopped the flow of blood by readjusting the bandage and twisting it tight with a splinter of rock. And the minute or so of rest had done Tom good. Myrtle had his revolver, but he extended his hand for it.

"I'm all right," said he.

"All right?" she questioned.

But she gave it to him; and, creeping forward a little, he said swiftly:

"Go and look—around the rock. See if there's any other place like this."

"I've looked. There isn't. All straight up and down—pretty near."

"Good!" said Tom. But he felt anything but good as he peered down the incline of rocks.

Weakness had returned to him even with that slight exertion, and the whole dark landscape reeled before his eyes. Peculiarly as he clamped his jaw, succeeding in steadying the landscape in a measure, it became full of other movements—ghostly, vague and tremulous—in infinite progression beyond the reach of his vision. A sense of familiarity came to him quite apart from any concrete resemblance: they were ox trains, ox trains, in plodding, rhythmic, inevitable advance—on, on, on! Tom rubbed his eyes and cleared them but the hallucination had helped him. So stubbornly, he would go on—and he took his first shot down the steep incline.

He hit nothing but a rock, for there was nothing but a rock to aim at. But there was a sound of crawling down there, and from a distance, other sounds—mutterings, bodily movements. Myrtle, lying beside him, said:

"They're mostly in a circle out there, just watching. I heard them——"

"I s'pose they would be," said Tom.

For that, he thought, would be their natural plan. They would form a cordon to prevent him and Myrtle from slipping down from the rock and creeping away through the grass, while a few of the more zealous warriors crept up to finish him. A headlong rush

would likely cost them more men, and would imperil Myrtle, too. But Tom, feeling that insidious weakness creeping over him again, would almost have welcomed it.

Below him he glimpsed a shadowy movement, and he fired, resting his hand on a rock. The recoil sent him dizzy.

"Missed!" he groaned. "Lord!"

"What is it?" whispered Myrtle.

"Nothing!" No use quitting—he wouldn't quit! Not while Myrtle—— Suddenly, with her there beside him and his thoughts on her, there came to him something that he had wanted to tell her a long time, that he must tell her before—well, while he could.

"Myrtle! You've been afraid—I want you to know, I wouldn't have, anyway."

"Yes?" as his voice trailed off.

"I wouldn't have done anything—to your father—for killing——"

He stopped, but that was enough. Myrtle's little cry, followed by silence, told him that she understood. He was almost sorry he had spoken—sorry to wound her, now. He fired again, almost aimlessly, for everything was blurred before him.

But she was murmuring something.

"I'm glad, Tom. But—mistake—he didn't kill——"

Only a few of her words came to him, for again he was drifting away. It was rather something of gladness in her tone that carried him back on a wave of startled wonder.

"What! What d'you say?"

"It wasn't him. He didn't kill your father. We were going to tell you, but——"

"Wait!"

Strength had suddenly flowed back into Tom. Halfway up the slope he glimpsed another crawling figure, and he fired. The report was followed by a yell of rage and pain, and sounds of a scrambling fall and a slide of rocks. But it was not that slight success that caused Tom's voice to rise elatedly as he turned to Myrtle, swiftly reloading with cartridges from his belt.

"He didn't? But how—— Myrtle, I saw the *brand.*" His tone changed to doubt. "You know. Oh, I hate to——"

"The brand!" Myrtle's voice became tense, savagely angry; it was raised in complete forgetfulness of the situation. "Put there by Kastner. I didn't know, either, until—— I thought he'd done it. But it was Kastner. He—*branded daddy!*" Again she was almost whispering, in shame and horror.

"What! He branded—— Wait!"

Tom faced the incline, took another shot, and then turned his head again.

"Kastner killed my father, you say. Go on."

"And daddy saw him," Myrtle said rapidly. "Daddy was bringing a horse to be shod. He would've told. He told Kastner he would. Kastner knocked him down and branded him. Branded your father's body, too—with the same iron—the same white-hot horseshoe. Said it'd prove to everybody that daddy did it. Just like you said—— Oh, Tom!"

And Tom heard Myrtle shudder at the abomination that had happened in that lonely blacksmith shop halfway across the continent. Horror affected Tom, too; but vivifying joy rose above it, and he cried:

"Lord, that's good! That explains the——"

Then he stopped. Words came too slowly for his racing thoughts, which in a moment reviewed and reconstructed the whole muddled problem that had tortured him the last two months. How clearly this explained everybody's actions! Here was Snyder, the weakling, innocent but with the brand of murder upon him, being bullied and controlled by Kastner with

the threat of accusation. And here was Myrtle playing what woman's part she could to save her father from an unknown danger, which Tom's story had made known and more terrible to her. Here was Mount, winning the truth from Myrtle and Snyder; and Kastner, discovering that Mount had learned it, brooding guiltily and fearfully over what Mount might do. So he had planned to have Snyder, sole witness of his crime, killed at Fort Laramie; and, that failing, had bargained with the Indians to destroy the whole train. How *gloriously* everything was explained, only Myrtle had —— But she was speaking again.

"Then you told me, and I told daddy —I had to, Tom. And Kastner heard me telling it. That was why—it was Kastner that tried to kill you that night. But he came back to camp over daddy's post. So daddy knew—and you remember how he acted. If it hadn't been for that—Kastner trying to kill you—I don't think I'd have told Jim Mount. But I did, and he said to let everything go till we got to Oregon. But—oh, Tom! I did want—to tell you."

Her voice broke with unshed tears, and her hand reached timidly out to Tom's bare shoulder. It was fortunate, for the touch was needed to revive him. Her story had been strong medicine indeed, but weariness was creeping over him again. Again, however, he fought out of it, and stared down the slide of rock. So slowly were the Indians advancing—nothing gratifying about that, however, considering the ebbing of his powers. But he would last, he resolved; he would stick—stick —stick; he would prod this failing body of his into resistance to the end. And the end—what would it be? Was there a chance for either?

"You've told me everything," he heard himself saying, "but what happened to the train."

"I don't know. Kastner tricked me away before the attack. He told me that you—— But I'm afraid the train's finished."

So was Tom afraid. Indeed, it was almost certain. Unwarned, the train would be wiped out. Kastner was too clever to leave anything to chance as to that. And he probably wasn't taking any chances now—of Myrtle being killed, for instance. That was the reason, likely, that the encircling warriors didn't fire, and maybe also the reason for the slowness of the advance. Or was there another reason for that? Were the Indians, little interested, avoiding peril? Or, again——

His thoughts grew as muddled as his body was weak, but he wished he knew what Kastner was doing. He heard Myrtle speaking again.

"Tom, I think I heard—something."

There was a note in her voice that he hardly dared credit. Was it, could it be, *hope?* Tom listened with head uplifted, then pressed an ear to the rock. He heard nothing but low movements and mutterings from the cordon of Indians, the sounds of the almost halted warriors below, and—yes, something else.

But nothing inspiring hope. The tinkling of a displaced stone toppling down the opposite side of their rock of refuge. The dragging sound of a human body over rock, and little fumbling and scraping sounds as fingers and feet fitted themselves into crevices.

"Myrtle!" Tom struggled to hands and knees. "I hear it, too. It's——"

"No, no!" she interrupted, pushing at him. "Keep down. Wait. All we've got to do is wait."

Tom could spare no strength to answer her. He kept on crawling forward, across the top of the rock.

"What are you doing?" She was whispering, afraid that the Indians below would learn of Tom's retreat. "Don't, Tom! Don't!"

But Tom crept on. He was puzzled by her objections, as by the hope he had fancied in her voice a moment before. But, then, it had been only fancy. The strategy of the enemy must be as plain to her as to him—holding them by a feigned attack up the slide, while one or more mounted the opposite wall of the rock.

One or more! Fervently Tom hoped that it would be only one, and that one, their real enemy. He hoped it and almost expected it, for Kastner was the really interested party in this attack, and his allies would likely insist that he take the post of danger. Then he saw his reasoning was right.

Poor as was the light, it was plainly Kastner's face that appeared above the edge of the rock. Tom swung up his revolver and tried to aim, but his weapon described wabbling circles. He fired and missed, and before he could fire again, Kastner had heaved himself up and straightened to his feet, facing Tom.

Tom had also got on his feet and was staggering forward to a point-blank shot. Walking dizzily, his sight confused, he was indeed almost upon Kastner without knowing it; so he felt a dull surprise when Kastner, with a leap and a blow, sent the revolver flying.

Tom closed with Kastner, instinctively, without thought, though if given all the thought in the world there was nothing else he could do. With his muscles all gone to limp rags, he grappled with Kastner, and the next moment was being thrashed about like a doll, pummeled with short-arm blows, assailed with furious, exultant curses that fell harmlessly on Tom's almost deaf ears.

"You'd buck me, would you! You'd hang me, would you! Take that—and that—and that!"

Then something unexpected happened. Tom, hardly conscious, though still fighting feebly, felt Kastner suddenly stiffen. Then he felt himself flung violently away by Kastner, to crumple down on the rock. And it seemed that Kastner's next curse was hardly directed at him.

"You! I'll break your——"

Tom did not hear the end of that. It seemed that the darkness was split by a single flash, and he thought he heard the much-diminished crack of a revolver. But everything was coming to him as through muffling, blinding, shadowy veils, thickening fast into an impenetrable mantle.

He was not even sure that he saw Kastner fall, nor that Myrtle ran past him, revolver in hand, to take up the defense of the slide. And the sounds of a more distant event to which Myrtle was listening—pounding hoofs, shouting men, the rattle of half a hundred guns—resolved themselves for him into the sluggish movements of innumerable ox teams, feet incessantly lifting and falling, with drivers yelling encouragement and directions, and long-braided lashes crackling over the backs of the patient beasts.

Slowly, very slowly, Tom came half awake.

There was no will, no conscious effort about it, at all. He wanted nothing, remembered nothing felt no pain; he was but a bit of drift being borne on dark, mysterious waters toward the port called consciousness. Time was nothing. He was as one with eternity.

But after a while, feebly, and with no conscious intention, he opened his eyes. Vaguely he became aware that he was lying in the open, on some sort of couch. Staring upward, he saw the sky pale with the first light of dawn. Remembering nothing, as though he were newborn, he watched that first faint gray become streaked with opalescence, flushed with crimson and gold, and then change into the clear blue of day. Birds chirped, water lapped near by, there were human voices.

Voices, movements, sounds of men and women. These aroused something in Tom, a faint first desire. Gently he stirred, with agony in every muscle. He desisted, but the effect of the effort and the pain was electric, starting a chain of memories that ran swiftly back over other intervals of consciousness, peopled by other faint voices and shadowy figures. These came and went confusedly, but among them one figure stood out, hovering over him constantly, cheering him with the sight and sound of her, reviving him with the living warmth of her hand, drawing him as by gossamer threads back to the warmth and light of life.

One figure. He named her. It was Myrtle.

And with the compelling thought of her, everything came back to Tom with a rush. Hastily, full of dread and hope, he turned his head, to see around him again the white-hooded wagons of the ox train.

The ox train, stirring with its familiar, intimate life. Women busy about the wagons or at fires outside the cordon. Men inside it folding their blankets or rising from their pillows of boots and saddles. The persistent, persistent ox train! So it had survived. Tom was very glad.

Some of the men came over and spoke to him. That was all; they were afraid to tire him. Presently Mount came, feeling Tom's forehead and wrist with horny, toil-hardened but gentle fingers, and staying a little longer than the others.

"You're better, younker. We'll be travelin' soon."

"How long we been here?"

"Two days."

"'Count of me?"

"Yes."

"What happened, anyway? Don't look like you'd had much of a fight."

"Well we didn't. They skinned away fast enough when they found we was ready for them. Then half of us took out after Myrtle, and I guess you remember the rest of it."

"Sort of," said Tom. But Mount, with a curious, kindly smile was turning away.

Tom closed his eyes for he was still very weak. But in a very few seconds he opened them again eagerly. No sound of her approach had come to him, but in some way not clear to him, Tom knew to whom it was that Mount had surrendered his place. And at the sight of her vivid face, no longer child-like, of her body no longer fragile-looking, but slender and strong beneath her rough cloth dress, it gradually seemed to Tom that health rebounded to him, and his feeble hands went up swiftly to meet her own.

"Tom!" She tried to put his hands back. "You've been very sick."

"I'm almost well. Mount said so. Myrtle!"

"Yes?"

"Your father? He's all right?"

"Yes. You've asked so often the last few days. I guess you don't remember—about what happened that night. Nobody was killed at all."

"Then there's nothing to hinder our——"

"Hinder what?" Her eyes retreated.

"Myrtle!"

Tom looked bashfully, hesitantly at her. He had to force himself to go on. "You started to tell me that night on the rock just how Kastner tricked you away from camp. I think I know already. Wasn't it my hat that did it?"

"Your hat!" She glanced at him, startled. "Yes, it was," she confessed.

"He told you I was in some kind of trouble outside the camp and wanted you to come, didn't he? Made me out to have done something that made me afraid to face the train again. And I wanted help—a message carried or something—and sent my hat to prove

it was me that was out there. That was about it, wasn't it?"

"Just about as you have told it, Tom." Now Myrtle was facing him, brave-eyed, gravely.

"Then, Myrtle, you just stoop down, and I'll tell you *what* I'm hoping there's nothing to hinder.

But in his eyes was really the explanation, as slowly in his weakness, he drew her down to him. She did not resist, though there were others all about. Withdrawing in flushed confusion from their first embrace, she stood regarding him for a moment with eyes grown tenderly happy, mistily luminous.

"Tom, there isn't a thing to hinder," said she, and then fled.

That seemed sufficient for one morning. But after a while the more practical-minded Tom grew thoughtful; and presently, catching Mount's eye, he beckoned him over.

"How far to Oregon, Mount?" questioned Tom.

" 'Bout two more months."

Whereupon Tom waxed indignant with a swiftness that left some doubt as to the pure spontaneity of the emotion.

"Two more months—and this train hanging around here on my account! What's the difference 'tween riding in one of the wagons and lying here? We're going to start this very morning, Mount."

"Aye, you'd feel that way," said Mount, grinning broadly. "But don't be worrying. We'll likely hit a preacher 'twixt here and there."

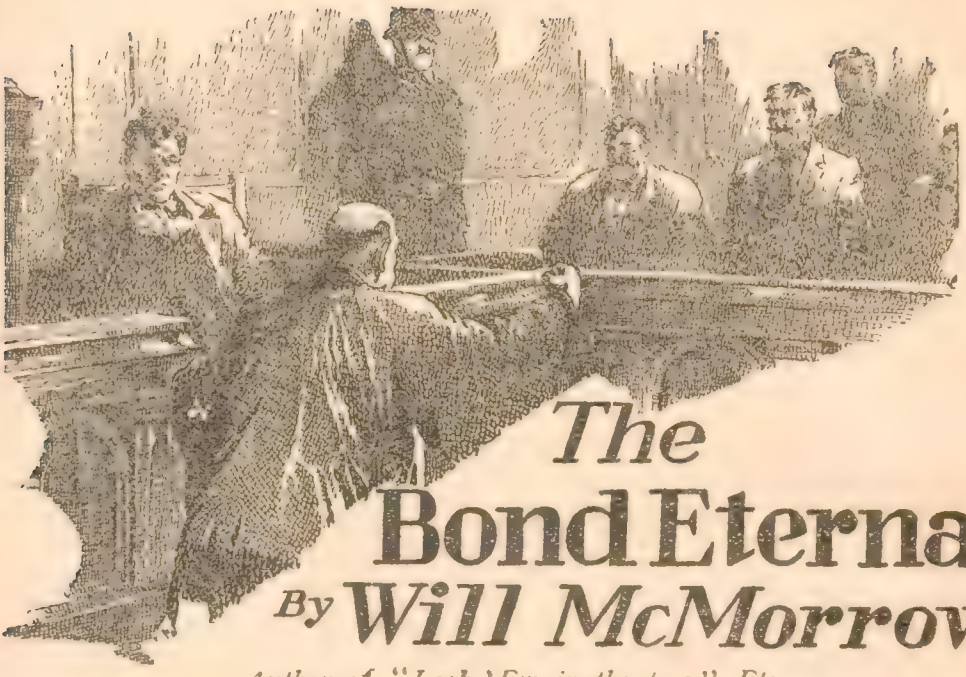
World air travel of the future in great air cruisers and a band of aërial pirates are graphically pictured in next week's POPULAR *in "The Sky Buccaneers," a complete novel by Will McMorrow.*

HORSES NOW OUTSIDE THE LAW

MANY of the States in the range country, where great bands of unbranded horses, unowned, unclaimed, and useless for all practical purposes, have been depasturing thousands of acres of land to the great detriment of the cowman and the sheepman, have within the past year enacted laws that are known as "Wild Horse" or "Round-up" laws, having for an object the cleaning of the ranges of all undesirable and worthless horses.

Stockmen had for several years been organizing and carrying on private round-ups without authority to sell and dispose of unbranded stock, and little was accomplished. Usually the prices for which horses would be sold after one of these round-ups was insufficient to pay the expense. Under the new laws the counties, through their commissioners, organize and have full charge of the round-ups, and all switch-tails caught in the dragnet can be sold.

These laws have given rise to a new industry in the range country and there are being established many small horse-packing plants where this stock is slaughtered and turned into something useful to commerce. Most of these plants are merely rendering plants, although some few pack the meat for export to France and other countries, curing the hides for leather, rendering the meat into grease, making cracklings for chicken feed, and grinding the bones for the same purpose. Some of these plants have a capacity of as many as a hundred head a day, but the great majority of them can only handle ten or twelve. The destiny of the horse—that is, the wild horse of the ranges—is the slaughter house.



The Bond Eternal

By Will McMorrow

Author of "Look 'Em in the Eye," Etc.

Once a good soldier—always a good soldier. The self-discipline learned in battle has its value in civilian life, too.

A COMPLETE STORY

THERE were three men and they crouched in the shell hole that was a slippery cup of mud, and Death chuckled and hummed in the tortured air, and his stepson, Fear, taunted the three lonely men with the smell of the long-dead around them—and presently one of the three left his rifle and slid to the bottom of the slippery cup, and grinned fixedly upward, slowly turning the yellow rain water pink—and the man with the waxed, gray mustache pointed soberly ahead through the rolling fog of gas, and the two men stood up, side by side, clubbing their empty rifles to meet the flashing gray line——

The picture snapped to nothingness—abruptly, as if the celluloid reel of memory had snapped in two—leaving the dusty walls of the courtroom a splotchy blank.

"Old Frisky" snapped as abruptly back to the present, frowning down his prominent and hairy nose at the perspiring, thundering king's counselor.

Mustn't go wool gatherin'. Best listen to what this chap 'ad to say. Seemed to a kind of an adjutant bloke fer the C. O. up at the desk.

"A dangerous and menacing character, gentlemen, as I shall prove. A person of violent, lawless, criminal proclivities, a man with whom property, life itself, is not safe while he is at large. I see before me a representative jury of intelligent business men, conscious of the protection they owe society, their possessions, their wives and children—England itself that is in constant danger from these, her enemies."

He ranted on hopefully to the twelve good men and true in the jury box. A round-shouldered, veal-faced man was the king's counselor, with a great vol-

ume of voice and a record for convictions, and he was working hard on this case, even with an easy conviction in sight.

"Damned civilian," Old Frisky muttered. "I'd soon take that blasted 'am off 'is back if I had 'im on parade in the old days. One of them windy blighters, too. I'd 'ave 'im in the guard room in two shakes."

"Wot s'y, mate?" Haggin, a little, greedy-eyed butcher, seated next to Old Frisky in the box, looked around.

"Eyes front!" Old Frisky snapped and scowled around for a second at his fellow jurors in their ordered ranks, for the habit of a lifetime is not easily broken and Old Frisky had been the strictest drill sergeant the Windsor Rifles ever had—or hoped to have—in his day. He caught himself in time before he roared a reprimand to Juror No. 8—obviously "idle on parade"—and looked grimly to the front himself.

He sat very erect—there was only one way Old Frisky could sit; his body a rigid line from the hips to the thin, square shoulders, his feet planted evenly and squarely on the ground, his waxed, gray mustache bisecting lean, tanned old cheeks, exactly parallel in every inflexible hair with the lines of the bushy eyebrows.

Haggin, the butcher, winked understandingly over his shoulder at Peebul, the draper, who wiped his spectacles, grinned nervously back, and ventured a whispered remark about "eccentric old blighter." They were mostly tradesmen on the jury, little men of worried lives and small holdings, fearful of robbers—the prosecutor had scored heavily when he selected them—and they fitted in better in that murky, dusty court, than did Old Frisky, late drill sergeant of the Windsor Rifles.

Flanked by Haggin and Drake, the greengrocer, Old Frisky looked like an aged mastiff between two mongrels.

Old Frisky did not want to be there especially. He would have preferred to have spent the evening in his own sacred corner of the Swan and Crown, behind a bottle of Guinness' Stout that he took regularly for his stomach's sake, as religiously as he stumped over to Buckingham Palace every morning with his silver-headed regimental stick under his arm, to watch—with appropriately bitter commentary on the condition of the army—the changing of the guard. Or he would have preferred a seat in the sergeant's mess of the Windsor Rifles, where, until drummers' call, he would accept with dignity and reserve libations poured by respectful men still in uniform, to the glory of the Windsor Rifles and the shades of the departed.

But these damned civilians—Old Frisky never admitted that he, himself, was now one of them—had little respect for a retired drill sergeant and less time to listen to reasons why he should not serve as juror. And somehow or other here he was, in the midst of as awkward a squad as he had ever harried about the parade ground.

Moreover, there was that matter of that wound he got at Spion Kop, and another he'd picked up since. It bothered him a bit in wet weather. Touch of fever, too, from the Indian campaign. Calcutta was always a hole for fevers.

He glared balefully at the prisoner in the dock.

There was a swab that belonged in the guard room if there ever was. A surly, unshaven ruffian with a black look, half frightened, half defiant. The defense—a young barrister appointed by the court—had said the prisoner had no friends, which was not surprising. He did not look like a type to attract friends.

The prisoner testified for himself in a growling monotone, mumbling his words savagely, looking neither judge nor jury in the eyes, and making altogether a poor show.

No, he hadn't hit the man. The man

had come to collect the rent. There had been a bit of an argument. The landlord had threatened proceedings. He was goin' to put the wife and the nippers out into the street. There'd been some pushin' about and he had run off on account of not wanting to 'ave the coppers nab him. This was all along of his havin' a record. Yuss. Two conwictions. Robbery an' assault.

But he hadn't butted the blighter with his head an' robbed him when he was unconscious. Some one else must have did that afore the coppers came. Just like a copper's tale to say a man would butt with his 'ead stead of usin' his fists. He wouldn't know 'ow to do it if he tried. It was a tale made up by the landlord, account of losin' his money.

The king's counselor nodded, smiled at the jury and nodded again, while the young barrister wriggled uncomfortably, and wondered how such an unlikely story would strike twelve little men from twelve little shops all fearful of robbers with records. Especially that grim old chap there—old soldier apparently and probably a beggar for duty and law and order and all that.

The "grim old chap" snorted through his dominant nose and glinted at the prisoner. Old Frisky weighed the indictments, one by one, tried the case and pronounced sentence without recourse to civilian statute.

A plain guard-room swab that. Needed a touch of the pack to straighten out those shoulders and some coal fatigue to boot. Two pack drills for needin' a shave—the damned skiver hadn't shaved in a week by the look of him. A pack drill for 'aving his tunic unbuttoned. Three extra drills an' a month's C. B. for bein' generally idle and dirty on parade. Beat up a civilian, too. One extra drill for that or a reprimand and two more pack drills and close arrest for bein' drunk an' disorderly. A touch of dis-*cip*-line was what the chap needed. It was blighters like that one that committed robbery an' murder —aye! An' fallin' asleep on sentry like as not! Cleanliness and dis-*cip*-line went hand in hand and a dirty civilian was like a dirty soldier—inefficient, disobedient, and a disgrace.

Presently, when the cross-examining, thundering prosecutor allowed, Old Frisky pointed a thin, stabbing forefinger at the prisoner's head and asked a question.

" 'Ow is it," he frowned, as if he would drag the answer from the prisoner by force of will, "you didn't shave this morning, my man?"

The jury tittered and the justice, snapped back abruptly from a contemplation of an eighty-nine at golf the next day, rapped sharply for order. Old Frisky, his indomitable nose redder than ever, revolved slowly and stiffly from the waist up and raked the eleven tradesmen from flank to flank with his eyes. Whereupon Haggin, who had tittered the loudest, avoided the enfilading fire and became rapt in watching the court attendant light the gas mantle, and Peebul, the draper, polished his horn-rimmed spectacles vigorously.

"It isn't—ah—necessary that you answer that," the justice advised the man in the dock. The prisoner had no intention of answering it. The suddenness of this unexpected shift from robbery and assault with intent to kill to shaving, left him more dogged and resentful than ever. He glowered at Old Frisky and muttered to himself.

"Please confine yourself to pertinent issues and avoid humorous remarks," the bench admonished.

"Yes, sir!" Old Frisky barked in a parade-ground voice, and stared rigidly to the front. He forbore to make unsoldiery explanations as to the serious intent of his question, and besides, the wound from Spion Kop was throbbing rather painfully in the dank fog that drifted through the narrow windows into the murky air of the dusty court-

room, where selfish little men wrangled over worthless things—ignoble men of ignoble lives, fearful of their possessions.

But it reminded Old Frisky of another fog—holding strangling death in its clammy folds—that once in a while crept across the meadows of France wherein men wrangled over no trivial thing and possessed nothing—not even their lives for long.

The prisoner snarled his way through his unlikely story; the king's counselor spoke at great length, mentioning "previous convictions" and "necessary example" and "your duty as respectable members of society"—at which point Haggin nodded soberly as one should, whose shop scales were so near right that they allowed only a minimum of profit, and the prisoner licked his lips uncomfortably, and the young barrister made a feeble, unsuccessful attempt to portray the hangdog prisoner as a good husband and father and sat down abruptly, having a dinner engagement.

The jury listened to the bench for a minute's introduction in law and retired, Old Frisky striding ahead and Peebul and Haggin bringing up the rear.

"Conwiction, of course," Peebul ventured.

"Conwiction," Haggin agreed. "Ain't safe to 'ave 'im at large. It won't take long if every one is reasonable. I 'ave my account to make up to-night at the shop."

"How much do you suppose he'll get?"

"Ten shill—I mean ten year at the least. I only 'ope that old army bloke don't 'old out for worse than robbery an' assault. 'E looks the kind wot would stick out for a 'anging verdict if 'e could. But I fancy it won't take long to settle this."

But it did take long.

It took so long that the spectators—they were few for it was not an interesting show, and dinner and music halls awaited—drifted out gradually, leaving the seats yawningly vacant; and the high seat of justice was empty after a while, too—for even a judge cannot live on justice alone; and the prisoner was spirited away through a door in the rear; and presently the young barrister stopped looking at his watch, for the dinner engagement was long past, and he, too, slipped out for a bite.

Then, for a while, the place was left to the ticking clock and the drifting fog and the shifting feet of the attendants.

Hours later the prosecutor, who had returned and was cheering up the young barrister, looked at his watch and frowned at the closed door behind which the jury rumbled faintly.

If he could have looked through that two-inch oak he would have seen eleven tired and sleepless small tradesmen—or rather ten, since Peebul, the draper, was dozing peacefully in the corner, having given up the battle—trying unavailingly to persuade Old Frisky to agree with them and let everybody go home to bed.

He sat very straight at the end of the long table, rather grim under the strain, his blue-veined hands resting heavily on the board and his frown directed at a point directly ahead and removed from the black-nailed forefinger that Haggin shook to emphasize his points.

"Bloomin' obstinacy!" the little butcher choked. "You're keepin' us 'ere out of our beds hour after hour, with some blarsted silly notions of yer own. It's plain duty, that's wot it is—plain duty on our part. It's a duty——"

"I know my duty, my man!" Old Frisky rapped out. "An' I don't need any little civvy to tell me, either. There's wot I got to say on it on that piece of paper that chap gave me an' I ain't changing it—not fer all the guard-room lawyers in England!"

Drake, the greengrocer, took Haggin's place and attempted the persuasive tactics that had won over more than one customer.

"Now look 'ere, old man. We gotta be reasonable abaht this. 'Ere is eleven men wot says one thing an' you says something else. You been fightin' us all night. We carn't report a disagreement on this—not after wot the justice said. It's got to be a verdict. 'Ere is eleven chaps wants to go 'ome to their families. Why carn't you be reasonable? These chaps is 'ungry, thirsty no doubt, wore out, an' all they want is to do their duty to law an'——"

"Aye!" Old Frisky rasped, pointing a square chin at the slumbering Peebul. "Like that swab that's playin' shut-eye sentry on post. Fine chaps, I'll warrant. It's no use. My mind is made up."

But Drake continued to talk, and after Drake there were others to take his place—hectoring, pleading, sarcastic according to their several dispositions—trying to overcome by sheer weight of words the stubborn old gentleman who was giving ground not an inch, fighting with his back to the wall, standing fast, the one mind securely anchored in a sea of rhetoric, while eleven minds wavered uncertainly and sought for compromise.

There was no thought of compromise in Old Frisky's head. The Spion Kop wound might throb and the fever rise in his bones, but he only gripped the arms of his chair the harder and frowned the mists away from before his eyes. He would not have admitted to himself—let alone a squad of civilians—that the damned Calcutta fever had him in a bad way to-night.

It made a blur out of faces and gave a man a kind of a dizzy feeling sometimes, which was rather awkward when you had to keep a clear head so that some civilian sea lawyer wouldn't trick you into agreement.

Old Frisky tightened his grip on the arms of the chair.

If he lost hold on himself now he'd slip to the floor. He couldn't give these blighters the satisfaction of downing him. And he couldn't compromise with them. It would mean retreat under fire, surrender. A man had to stand by his colors and the traditions——

Old Frisky leaned forward, his prominent nose pointed fiercely at the whining Haggin, his eyes ranging along the line of uneasy faces bordering the table.

"Speak up, man!" Old Frisky rasped hoarsely. "What 'ave you decided on? Guilty or not?"

"We'll send fer the record again," Haggin muttered sullenly. "I don't fancy bein' 'ere the bleedin' night."

The attendant that brought the record returned with a whispered report to his mate.

"The old bloke is 'olding them orff. Tough old beggar wiv a gimlet eye. I marked 'im in the jury box for a bad un. 'Ark at him now."

The other attendant harked and shook his head at the dull roar of Old Frisky's voice from the jury room.

"'E ought to be 'ad in charge," he grumbled, "fer disturbin' the peace. Fancy keepin' juries out of bed to two o'clock, an 'is honor wiv 'is indigestion an' all. Why carn't the bleedin' old sweat give the lad ten year an be done with it? Not 'im——"

"Best go call the justice. 'Ere they come now from the room."

They came droopingly into the fog-swept, bleakly lit courtroom, laggingly like an army in defeat. Old Frisky brought up the rear, the habit of a lifetime holding his thin shoulders straight, holding his chin up, even though he swayed blindly.

"Steady!" he muttered, and felt for the back of the chair. "Steady along the line."

Doors popped open and shut, black-robed justice appeared aloft and white-faced prisoner appeared below. Every one appeared magically awake, including the attendants and the king's counselor who wanted to be in at the death; and the prisoner stood up; and presently

Haggin, who was also foreman, found his voice, avoiding the piercing eye of the prosecutor:

"We finds the prisoner not guilty!"

Old Frisky was staring straight to his front, holding hard to the arms of the chair as he had for the past six hours in the jury room, and if the roar of the seas was in his ears and occasionally the whole room seemed to fade out emptily, he made no sign. He might have been a man carved from wood—a solid, weather-beaten oak for choice—and it is doubtful if he heard the disappointed bellow of the king's counselor or the incisive and uncomplimentary dismissal of the bench to the jury.

He was still there when the last of the jury straggled out and the prisoner, feeling strange in his freedom, slouched up.

"They told me," he mumbled, "that it were you that stood agin' them all night fer—fer acquittal. They was all ready to gimme ten of the best."

Old Frisky's mustache bristled.

"Say 'sir' when you speak to me, my man. "I'll 'ave none of your blasted familiarity!"

The man's shoulders straightened and his fingers stiffened along the seams of his trousers, elbows pulled smartly in.

"Yes, sir."

"A damned idle soldier!" Old Frisky snapped. "An' a damned idle civilian, too, I'll warrant! A disgrace to your regiment, whatever it was. But you were a soldier for all that an' I wouldn't see you tricked by no blasted civvies."

"I didn't rob 'im, sir. There was a ring of truth in the man's voice. "I been in trouble before an' I been quick with my 'ands, but I ain't done that. They was all set to send me to Dartmoor."

Old Frisky nodded grimly. "An they would 'ave, you can take yer affidavit on that, if they could prove you laid 'ands on that man. You know me now?"

"Yes, sir. You was a drill sergeant in the Windsors. I remember now. It was a bloomin' 'ot spot at Loos. Evenin' it was—an' only the two of us after a day of it——"

"Dawn, Old Frisky corrected softly. "Dawn an' there was a bit of gas in the air an' a bit of shrapnel, too."

"Dawn, yes—and the Guards comin through the gas cloud like they was on parade, an' the cheerin' from the shell holes when they seed the line——"

Old Frisky's dominant nose pointed ahead through another gas—the murky air of a courtroom where little men squabbled ignobly.

"I wouldn't 'ave 'elped you if I thought you had robbed 'im. And I know you attacked that man. That's how I recognized you. I seen you do that head-buttin' trick, but you had a 'elmet on then an' it was an enemy captain. But civilians wouldn't understand that."

He pointed to the door with a hand that shook a trifle.

"There's your road, my lad—a clear road, an' there's them that walks it with 'ead up an' their buttons a-shinin' an' there's them that don't."

He clapped his hat on his head and stared fiercely at the nearest attendant.

"A brother'ood, I suppose the preachers would call it—a blurry brother'ood it was, of men keepin' clean an' carryin' on an' doin' their blasted duty shoulder to shoulder as soldiers should—an' between me an' a kitchen swab like you there's only that! But it saved you tonight for yer nippers. An' I had to do a bit of a rear-guard action, too. So I 'opes you'll keep your bloomin' silly 'ead up an' yer eyes front. March off!"

The attendant, who rattled his keys through the courtroom five minutes later, stopped and called to his mate.

"'Ere, Bill! We'd best get a glass of water an' a cab fer the old bloke. He's collapsed on the stairs!"

Watch for more tales by Will McMorrow—in THE POPULAR.

In Four Parts
Part I

Author of "Sandollar,"

Here starts a mighty easy-to-read story of race-track Bonnie, star jockey, and a different sort from most riders,

CHAPTER I.

TWO SIDES TO ONE MAN.

TO those gentry who follow the races from track to track with the assiduous regularity of blackbirds in the wake of the plow, the town of Tia Juana, just across the Mexican line, is known as "Aunt Jane," and sometimes this pet name is amplified to "Aunt Jane, the old lady from hell." The race track which operates there through the winter months is not designated as "Aunt Jane's park" by these regulars, but is cynically alluded to as "Aunt Jane's back yard." And for this, too, there is a reason.

Tia Juana is the beneficiary—or the victim—of geography. It caters to Americans who cross a border for greater freedom from the restraints of native laws, and here along streets where swinging doors are numerous, the bowl of Tom and Jerry still sits openly on the bar.

Here, too, if certain reports are credible, gather human nondescripts and sweepings from points north, comparatively secure from police departments that let their interests lapse at their country's edge.

Yet if many turfmen of the more substantial sort regard the winter meeting south of the line with something of disdain, they make, to that general judgment, one notable exception. It is at Tia Juana that the Coffroth Handicap is run, and the Coffroth offers one of the largest money rewards for thoroughbred speed and stamina which the North American continent affords. So it comes to pass that this annual fixture stands out in its tawdry setting as the Kohinoor might stand out in the window of a pawnshop.

But perhaps this history has little to

by Charles Neville Buck

Flying Hoofs

"All the King's Horses," Etc.

men, thoroughbred horses, and a high-bred girl. Joe falls in love with the daughter of a wealthy aristocrat.

do with Aunt Jane's back yard, after all—at least until it has wandered far afield in other locales. Perhaps it is more concerned with a bobtailed cat of unconsidered origin and a horse of royal parentage foaled in blue-grass pastures—a horse that gave magnificent promise and shamefully broke it. Then again, perhaps the cat and the horse are also only incidental and the true core of the matter is the avalanche of human affairs which swept into its devastating rush by these trivial causes.

Indeed if one is to follow from the beginning the affairs which are vital to the men and women concerned, to say nothing of the horse and the cat, one must go back to days considerably prior to the organization of the Tia Juana Jockey Club or the building of its racing plant. One must retire into that bygone era when race-track wagering depended neither upon the "iron men" of the parimutuels nor the evasive system of the "oralists" for its banking facilities, but dealt directly with picturesque knights of blackboard and chalk who made open book in the betting rings.

This florid fraternity of other days threw into ephemeral prominence some quaintly picturesque characters, and of them all none presented a more engaging study in human contrasts and anomalies than did Shannon Wiley.

When this layer of odds first came out of Kentucky to make book around the metropolitan tracks, he was still a youngish man with a deceptively quiet eye and a fashion of speech in which lingered a cadenced softness that misled some strangers with its specious impression of diffidence.

When Shannon Wiley first "cut in" as a bookmaker at Sheepshead Bay track, he was adventuring into new

fields, and there has been no Sheepshead Bay track for almost a score of years. After the initial afternoon of operating his bazaar of chance, he drifted with several acquaintances to the Hoffman House bar—and for years there has been no Hoffman House bar.

"Here's a thing it might be well for you to remember, Wiley," a veteran breeder from the blue grass volunteered in a lowered voice. "You're a raw recruit in this Eastern game, and it's a different game from that of the West. These Easterners look down their noses at everything that comes from the South and West, horses and men alike—until they've made good."

"That's fair enough," responded Wiley indifferently. "I'm going to shoot square and I'm willing to let the boys size me up for themselves."

"That's not just what I mean," went on the horseman who had raced strings East and West and whose experience was mellow. "I mean that wherever sporting men gather, somebody is cock of the walk. Here among these New York bookmakers it happens to be 'Chicago Ben' Kelly. He's the bully of the betting shed. A new man must either watch his step with Chicago Ben, or take Ben's place at the top of the pile away from him. So far nobody's done that latter thing."

"Well, as long as he can make his bluff good, he's entitled to cash on it, I reckon. But Chicago Ben doesn't sound like a New York name to me."

The older Kentuckian shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know just what his reputation rests on, but Ben came East some years ago," he gave information. "He's got the name of being king of the bookmakers around here, and he rather insists on being treated like a king."

Wiley turned in his hand his glass of mineral water—he never poured a stronger drink—and nodded gravely:

"It's nice to know what a fellow likes," he made thoughtful observation; then he jerked his head toward the door to inquire, "That's your king coming in now, ain't it?"

A florid fellow, conspicuously dressed, entered the place with several companions traveling in his wake, and the elderly turfman nodded.

"That's the big boy, and the sooner you get solid with him the sooner you'll be in right. It's not so different from politics. You've got to get your credentials from the boss."

Wiley was standing near the end of the bar, and it was almost to his elbow that the so-called king of the bookmakers drifted in the crowd. He was talking volubly and aggressively as he entered, yet it was not exactly an argument in which he was engaged—because Chicago Ben did not argue. He was accustomed to speak categorically and with the finality of one promulgating the law. There was some point of debate concerning the time in which a certain furlong had been run by a certain horse, and the big fellow wished to quote an authority. He searched his pockets for a copy of the day's racing forum and found none there.

"Who the hell has a dope sheet?" he demanded testily. Glancing about him and seeing what he needed protruding from the pocket of the new arrival from Kentucky, he jerked it unceremoniously forth. Having glanced at its contents, Chicago Ben flung the paper down again on the bar, and Shannon Wiley smiled quietly as he refolded it and restored it to its place in his side pocket. A few minutes later Chicago Ben again felt impelled to consult the authority and once more he reached out his hand to take what he wanted. But this time the tall stranger interposed a hand of his own, and for just a moment a wintry smile flickered in his moss-agate eyes.

"Mister Kelly," he drawled with a specious amiability, "that's the second

time you've done that—and twice is too much. If you want my dope sheet, ask for it. I don't like having my pockets picked."

A sudden silence of surprise fell on the little group at that end of the bar, and Kelly himself stood for a moment in amazed silence. Then he spoke truculently:

"Touchy, are you?" he demanded.

"Maybe," answered Wiley, still smiling but with a chilly eye. "Touchy about a few things, I reckon. Pocket-picking is one of them."

Chicago Ben was not an adept at repartee but his vocabulary was endowed with a certain lurid vigor which he now invoked to its full. For the barb of wit he substituted the embroidery of unexpurgated expletives of which his supply was richly abundant.

The next moment, Chicago Ben, with the aid of his companions, was picking himself up from the floor of the bar. His eyes were bloodshot and his self-esteem stung into a madness of rage. His hand reached instinctively for a bottle to use as a bludgeon.

It was a white-jacketed bartender who caught his hand, and in a moment more the bellicose bookmaker was being pinioned by anxious friends seeking to restrain him from indulgence in the expensive solace of homicide. It had not been necessary to grapple with Wiley, because after striking his one blow, he had stood thoughtfully awaiting developments, and outwardly, at least, he was as unexcited as before. His quiet eyes were, if anything, chillier than they had been.

The commotion was quieted in much the same fashion that a dog fight is adjusted: by the participants being forcefully hauled apart. And shortly thereafter, in his own hotel room, Shannon Wiley sat patiently listening to the expostulations of his friend.

"It looked as if you deliberately picked a quarrel," the older man offered stern rebuke. "You aren't any dewy violet, are you? You're a practical man, aren't you? Can't you stand a little cussing when you know in advance a fellow is peculiar?"

"I've been cussed early and often by people that know plenty about cussing, and I've pretended to like it," Wiley assured him. "I don't get sore or excited over little things like that, but this bird gave me as good a chance as I needed, and I'd have been a sucker to pass it up."

"Chance for what? Chance to go out of your way to make enemies when you need friends in a strange town? Chance to get jailed before you've even gotten the hayseed brushed off of you? You acted a plain damn fool, if you ask me."

Wiley smiled again out of his agate eyes.

"Maybe so and maybe not," he made speculative response. "You said he thought he was cock of the walk around here didn't you? Well, when I start business in a new place, I usually look around for the fellow that answers to that name, and me and him find out where we stand. Settle with the boss once and for all, and other birds don't pick on you. It saves trouble in the long run. Chicago Ben looked to me like a right good man to hit, so I pasted him—and that's all there was to it."

Such was Shannon Wiley's entrance on the metropolitan stage, where he was not long to remain a stranger. Men said that his nerves were as cold and ponderously inflexible as the bergs that drift down from the pole, and that though he was an honest gambler he was as mercilessly exacting as Shylock in collecting his dues to the uttermost farthing.

Colorful and many were the stories that went winging through the sporting world of this boldest operator on the stock exchange of chance—and some of these stories were true. One for which

he never encouraged publicity was that of his origin and the name he had been born to in one of the county seats of blue-grass Kentucky. In the home town they knew that the black sheep of a good family had shown the decency to change his name when he abandoned the traditions of his blood to throw his lot with men who lived by their predatory boldness and their wits. It was as if the son of a navy family had turned pirate. And this pirate had taken some notable prizes.

As far as the East is from the West lay all the criteria of life as gauged by this knight of the chalk and by the faded old widow of a Confederate officer, who left her home one day on a mission urged by sheer desperation. For the first time in her long life she was bound for the race course at Churchill Downs. The men of her family had frequented race tracks just as they had taken their whisky, and she had equally deplored each of these unchurchly dissipations. Now death had claimed all the men of the family, unless one counted the baby grandson, whose upbringing and support rested on her own frail shoulders. Bit by bit the old Popeworth estate had been gnawed away by debt and ill fortune. Acre by acre it had smoldered down in the ashes of poverty with no live flame left to rekindle it. Now the faded respectability of this old woman was a shell of forced pride covering a dire emptiness. A great past, a poignantly meager present and a terrifyingly dubious future—that was her story.

Then one day a wholly unaccountable and quite mad resolve leaped full-accoutered in her mind, and was straightway acted on—an act which transgressed the whole principle of a life of regulated preciseness and which flagrantly outraged her conscience. Never before would she have entertained such an idea, but of course desperation lay back of it, the desperation of a child's sore need. She had been reading of the amazing, if unchristian, successes of this celebrated plunger, Shannon Wiley, whose grandparents had been of her own world. She remembered him as a gentlemanly little boy long before he forsook the ways of virtue—and changed his name.

After all, the hundred dollars which she had unaccountably determined to carry into the betting ring at Churchill Downs on that Derby of long ago, would mean little unless it could be amplified, and the boy must be provided for. She could not bring herself to delegate a task for which her strait-laced conscience censured her. If it were to be done at all, it must be done in person, and nowadays few people in Louisville, where she had once been well known, would know her.

The little old woman bought herself a general-admission ticket to the Downs. On that day of the great race the betting shed was a vortex of milling and excited humanity. In those years it was not customary for genteel women to elbow their way into the inclosure where from many platforms surmounted with blackboards and cash drawers, the hucksters of chance presided over the clamor of the gamblers.

The old lady shuddered a little as she stood clutching her hundred dollars in this unfamiliar maelstrom. She wondered how she could find Shannon Wiley, and whether after she had found him he would spare her time for a hearing in all that clamor of wild confusion.

But at last he was pointed out by a deferential negro, and for a little while longer she hung around the outer edges of the sweating and regrettably profane crowd. Slowly she edged her way about the fringe until she found herself near the back of the block where the man with coldly emotionless eyes stood in command of his sheet writers and money changers.

At times she could even catch words

shouted up from the ground and answers bellowed down. The regenade from gentility to whom she had come seemed to gaze out rather disdainfully as his eyes wandered over the upturned faces, some avidly calculating; some cupidity crazed.

She saw a young man, elaborately dressed but pitiably drawn of face, approach the stand and beckon excitedly to Wiley. She saw Wiley bend very slightly forward with an expression of forbidding unresponsiveness.

"Shannon," began the young man hurriedly, "I want to bet a hundred on this race."

"All right," came the short response; "there are men here to take your money."

"But," the better held his voice in a confidential tone through which sounded a note of pleading, "I want to bet a marker. I'll settle it before I leave the track."

"Nothing doing." The response was terse and unequivocal.

"But you know me," urged the would-be customer. "My credit ought to be good with you." Suddenly the voice flared testily, "Didn't I lose five thousand to you yesterday?"

"You made your own bets, didn't you?"

"Yes. And now I want credit—for a marker of a hundred on——"

"Never mind what it's on. Tell it to somebody else. I'm not interested."

The young man reddened with gusty anger.

"Hard-boiled eggs, aren't you?"

"Maybe so. In this game if a man isn't hard boiled he's soon scrambled. I said nothing doing." And the gambler turned his back callously on the applicant for credit.

The old woman had crept timidly nearer; but as she heard this colloquy, her heart sank to despair. Other people were besieging the attention of Wiley and he was hurrying them along with a glacial impersonality. He offered slender promise of help in misfortune.

She turned flutteringly away, and as she did so, the eye of the man on the block fell upon her. For a moment his attention was arrested only by the anomaly of her presence there; for the gentility and the poverty of her would have been clear reading to an eye less keenly schooled in human appraisal than his own. Then he recognized her. A memory out of childhood rose distinct, and her name came back to him. When he had been five years old she had held him on her knee; she belonged to the world he had renounced but which he had never forgotten.

Abruptly Shannon Wiley stepped down from the block, and as he reached her his hat was off and in his hand.

"Mrs. Popeworth," he demanded, "what are you doing here?"

The old lady fell to stammering as though she had been detected in crime. Her throat closed and tightened; then as he had taken her elbow and leaned deferentially toward her. she found herself talking fast and almost incoherently.

"I've heard how successful you were —I thought maybe you might give me a good tip—maybe I might win something."

The stone face of Shannon Wiley had grown somberly grave.

"Yes, ma'am, go on," he prompted her gently enough, and when she had talked a little more he asked quietly: "How much did you bring to bet?"

She held out her small roll of bills.

"A hundred dollars," she told him somewhat faintly.

The gambler nodded as though the episode were in no way unusual.

"Now listen to me," he said, speaking carefully, as one might speak to a child, "that much money would have to be played on a long shot to bring back enough to count—and long shots are chancy things. I'll tell you what to do.

Leave your bank roll with me. Let me run it through the day's card. I'll do the best I can with it. Maybe you'll win—maybe not. Don't come back until after the last race. Give me that much time."

She tried to thank him, but he shook his head, and for once his smile lighted and softened the sphinx blocking of his face to an expression more humane.

"Don't thank me yet," he warned. "I may lose it all for you."

Then Wiley climbed back into his stand. Turning to his ticket writer, he tossed over the bills and directed with unemotional brevity:

"Write me a ticket for five thousand to a hundred—on the winner."

The shirt-sleeved employee looked up blankly.

"On—the winner?" he repeated in amazement. "On the winner—whatever it is?"

"You heard me, didn't you?" inquired the chief coldly. "Well, when you hear me, don't waste time asking questions. You're here to obey orders."

CHAPTER II.

THE HORSE THAT FELL.

WHEN Jerry Ferris sent a colt to the barrier, one of the uncertainties of racing was eliminated from its broad gamut of chance. Every sharpshooter and punter in the betting shed knew that wherever that starter might finish on the wire, the stable would be trying its best. No jockey wearing the Ferris' silks would ever carry secret instructions of a devious sort. His order would always be the straight: "Do your best, boy."

Shannon Wiley who, since the death knell had sounded over open bookmaking, had campaigned a small stable of his own, should have had full opportunity of judging these matters.

"A lot of things can be said for and against Jerry Ferris," was Wiley's comment one day as he stood in the paddock at the Downs. "Millionaire horsemen have their enemies, and I never liked this lad. He high-hats everybody and thinks he's the only two-legged thoroughbred on the turf. But I've got this to say for him: If it's cost him some money, now and then, to keep certain personal scandals out of the papers, he's never had to blow in hush money about his race-track performances. There's three things under the sun this Ferris person really loves, and a man that's true to three loves does pretty well."

"What's them three, Mr. Wiley?" inquired the chance companion to whom he addressed his personal estimate, as the starters were being led in for a two-year-old dash. This acquaintance was on occasional racegoer not deeply versed in the lore of the track, who felt that he was listening to esoteric instruction when this oracle spoke.

Wiley stood gazing at the trim figure and the slightly supercilious face of the rich man at his stall door, and his response was dry.

"Himself, his daughter, and his racing stable."

"Well, why wouldn't he race straight? A rich man can afford to do that."

"It ain't every rich man that does," was the crucial rejoinder. "I don't mean to say that Ferris always expects to win. No man does. Now in this heat, for instance, he's sending out a two-year-old which may be ready or may not; but if the colt is good enough to earn brackets, he'll get 'em, see? He'll be trying every jump of the way."

It was not always that Shannon Wiley was inclined to be talkative, and his present companion, who wished to make the most of what he recognized as a rare opportunity, asked other questions.

"Is there any way a man can tell whether Mr. Ferris, for instance, thinks he has a certainty in a particular race?"

The veteran shrugged his broad shoulders.

"He generally expresses his opinion free enough as to the big stakes. In small events like this, he's apt to keep his mouth shut. But there's a thing I've noticed." Wiley paused, and his cool eyes lighted with faint amusement. "A man gets to watching small things when he's been a paddock rat for thirty years. And yet this dead give-away I have in mind is a thing that Ferris don't realize himself, or he'd quit it."

For a moment the other man standing at the paddock rail wondered whether his celebrated companion was not making sport of his ignorance; but as he looked at the rugged face and its steadiness of expression, he realized that he was listening to scraps lifted at random out of a comprehensive scroll of experience. He was being made the beneficiary of a mood of unaccustomed loquacity.

The gong had jangled and the jockeys were trooping into their stalls; then, just as Ferris finished a few low-voiced words to his boy, both standing by his colt's head, the rich sportsman reached absent-mindedly up and with a fondling gesture, took one of the young horse's ears in his hand. It was a brief and negligent action, but Wiley laughed.

"You can run along now, and make a small bet, if you like," he instructed his companion briefly. "Ferris thinks mighty well of Vulcan in this stanza."

"But you didn't ask him. How did you find out—and when?"

"Just now. When he took hold of the colt's ear. He always does that when he's extra confident. It's the give-away I spoke of, and he hasn't an idea that he was tipping off several paddock rats plainer than words when he did it. Run along now and play that youngster straight on the nose."

"Thank you." The man turned impulsively toward the betting shed, then hesitated.

"Say, Mr. Wiley," he inquired, "the boy that's up on this colt is an apprentice, isn't he? The program says so. Can he handle the horse well enough?"

"The boy," Wiley assured him, "is one of the best—apprentice bug or no apprentice bug. I ought to know, because I hold his contract and I've taught him his business."

The line of fractious young horses were following the red-coated marshal out in the parade. They danced gingerly, as will these baby racers to whom the game is still new and fraught with febrile excitement. Their riders were warily quieting them with voice and caress, guarding against flighty bolts into runaways.

Vulcan was a dark chestnut, finely drawn in greyhound slimness. He pranced sidewise with the distended nostrils and outstanding veins of high nerve tension.

At length the field was lined behind the barrier, and the starter was having his troubles. His task was much like that of seeking to hold in alignment a dozen globules of quicksilver on an unsteady board.

The high-strung juveniles wheeled, reared and kicked as sweating assistant starters fanned their confusion into flame with the loud and injudicious cracking of bull whips. Then at length the webbing snapped skyward and the race was on.

Across the way from the grand stand a few men, mostly track employees, stood against the infield rail, and one of them who had been beguiling his waiting moments with the study of a form sheet, held the open paper in his hand. Palpably he had fancied the Ferris colt, for as the struggling mass of youngsters tailed out and settled down to their work, he let out a blatant whoop.

"Vulcan got away! There he comes through!"

The dark chestnut over whose with-

ers bent a small figure in maroon and black, was racing upward from an unfavorable position just back of the leaders, and after a poor start he was gaining ground with a fine turn of speed. At the stretch head the three pacemakers which led the chase swung wide, and the boy in the maroon-and-black jacket, shot his mount alertly through the gap they had opened and laid him close to the rail. The jockey was neither whipping nor spurring, but he was aiding and abetting his colt with the encouragement of a capable hand ride.

"He's jest washin' clothes!" yelled a negro stableboy as the lad's hands rose and fell on either side of the gleaming neck, supporting Vulcan's head, lengthening his stride, hurling him forward.

Gamely the colt came along, his boy's near boot almost brushing the rail as he passed the front runners and took the lead. There seemed nothing to it but Vulcan, coming gamely from behind, racing well within himself, lengthening his lead from a dubious neck to a commanding length, to two lengths, to three.

Then, as the leader swept inside the sixteenth pole, the man who leaned on the rail let out an ear-splitting howl.

"Vulcan wins!" he told the world, and as he spoke his arm swept up in an instinctive wave of triumph, his paper in his hand.

To the young horse, to whom the crowded stands and the thunderous clamor along the stretch were still confusingly new, that flaunted scrap of white paper brandished by a careless hand almost under his nose, was a terrifying thing. He went up in the air like a flying quail shot in the head. He came down to earth off his stride and as he veered away from the thing which had frightened him, he crossed his legs. Before he could regather himself Vulcan was down in a sprawling heap and over him in a yellow dust crater piled two of the closest contenders. It was a welter of flying hoofs and crumpled bodies.

The thunder-rolling of human outcry which always travels with a finishing field along the final furlong was already in full voice. Now it did not swell in volume but it changed in character. From the tumult of exhortation it altered to a multitudinous scream of horror.

Then the fallen horses began scrambling to their feet, lashing about with perilous, flaillike hoofs. One boy rolled sidewise out of the violent mess. A second came confusedly to his feet, standing dazed but miraculously unscathed in what looked like an explosion of hide and flesh. A third lay pitifully still and broken—and this third was the mite that had been so competently nursing the head of the chestnut colt, Vulcan.

Sweeping in a curve around the litter from behind came horses that had, a moment ago, no chance of victory. Suddenly pallid, but set of feature, the boys in their saddles finished out with whip and spur while the judges dutifully kept their eyes on the finish. Then figures ran trailing out onto the track. Some chased the riderless colts. Some went to the boys who had been unhorsed.

Two of the three fallen jockeys came limping across the stretch head on their own legs. A small group of rescuers closed about the third and screened him from public view as they carried him away.

Standing in his box, Jerry Ferris shook his head and shrugged his shoulders with a fatalistic acceptance of defeat. But for many days afterward men who had been at Shannon Wiley's elbow talked of an unusual thing. Wiley had been stationed by the palings just under the stewards' kiosk, and it was said that his sphinx face had for a moment been like that of a frightened woman who sees ghosts. Certain it is that he vaulted the sharp palings of the

fence with a heedless agility and that he was among the first to reach the fallen jockey. It is certain, too, that when the ambulance carried the still figure away from the track. Shannon Wiley rode in it with a face once more set to immobility but drained of its customary ruddiness.

In the cafés and hotel lobbies that night where horsemen congregated there was talk of this agitation—since agitation on the face of Shannon Wiley was extraordinary enough to assume news value. Already it was known that none of the boys had been fatally hurt. Only one would be kept long out of the saddle, and that one, of course, was the urchin who had been piloting Jerry Ferris' chestnut.

"Well, for once in his life Shannon Wiley let his stony face crack into humanity," commented an old-timer. "I was standing at his elbow one day at New Orleans when he lost a cool fifty thousand, and I didn't see a flicker in his eye or a vein jump in his temples. But to-day when a kid that works round his stable got a spill, the man was plain scared. He couldn't have turned whiter if the boy had been his own son."

"Well, how do you know he isn't?" came the cynical inquiry from another member of the group. "He might be, at that."

"Where do you get that stuff? What tripe are you trying to hand us?"

The cynical one smiled meaningly.

"I'm just supposing. Wiley never drinks or smokes; it's bad for the nerves. But he's always fallen for women. Every wise guy is a sucker somewhere along the line. In a long career at sporting life he might have acquired a son, mightn't he? He might have taken the kid under his wing in one way or another, mightn't he? This boy calls him 'Uncle Shan' and his other stableboys call him 'Mister Wiley.'"

"You're just romantic," one of his auditors informed the author of so fantastic a conjecture. "I've been around that stable a good bit. Wiley works that kid like a slave. The boy may call him Uncle Shan, but he does his chores before he eats just the same as every other swipe around the barn—white or black. He ain't no passenger. He's got the makings of a great jockey in him, and he works his way."

"That ain't saying nothing," argued the persistently imaginative one. "Wiley wouldn't make a pet out of a son, even if he acknowledged him to the world. He'd bring him up hard boiled because he's hard boiled himself."

While these fruitless speculations were being indulged in among the gossiping crowds that the races had brought to Louisville, the man whom they chiefly concerned was sitting by a hospital cot. It was not a ward cot, but one in a private room, and the surgeon in attendance was not one provided by charity for public patients but a practitioner of established reputation.

So long as the verdict of life and death hung suspended, the gambler of the florid reputation had not left his place at the bedside, and the nurses could have told of an agonized anxiety that had seemed to eat corrosively into the man's soul.

Then with the relief of the announcement that Death would not come, the loosened emotions of Shannon Wiley had again withdrawn into a shell of frosty immobility.

It was so that the apprentice jockey, Joe Bonnie, saw him when he first opened his eyes to sensibility. It was so that Jerry Ferris found him when he correctly and courteously came to the hospital to inquire after the boy who had been injured in his silks.

"I came to ask about Joe," said the impeccably groomed millionaire. "They tell me it's not as bad as we feared."

"No," answered the gambler, with no show of feeling. "He won't die and he won't be a cripple, but he'll lie in plaster for some time before he rides again."

"And by the way," suggested Ferris, "I want the best done for Joe that can be done. I don't want any expense spared. He was riding my colt and I feel responsible."

Almost imperceptibly Wiley stiffened.

"There won't be any bills sent to you, Mr. Ferris," he made announcement, "but I'm obliged to you just the same. The accident just happened and Joe takes his chances when he rides."

"But somebody should look after boys like this," protested Ferris with his irritatingly detached politeness. "He's a member of your stable staff, but he was riding for me to-day."

"I reckon you don't quite understand," said Wiley quietly. "Maybe it isn't necessary for you to understand it. This boy is under my care. The limit of what he has in a case of need is what I've got. The best there is won't be any too good for him. But I pay his bills."

The wealthy patron of a sport permitted a perplexed smile to twist his lips, and possibly some conjecture as cynical as that which had been expressed in the irresponsible gossip of the hotel lobbies strayed through his thoughts—to be at once dismissed as unimportant. At all events he nodded his assent.

"Just as you say, of course. My daughter Leslie is in the car. She saw the accident and she wanted to express her sympathy in person. That is, of course, if he can see visitors." The turfman paused and added: "Leslie is about the boy's age, and his accident made a profound impression on her."

Shannon Wiley's poker face softened to a suggestion of gratification.

"That's mighty nice of her," he said. "Joe will be pleased, I know."

The girl of about sixteen who came into the hospital room with her father and the ex-bookmaker, looked at the bed-ridden figure, stiff with its splints and bandages, and the smile on her face became impulsively tear-misted. She had seen this boy ride often, and on several occasions she had stood with her father at the paddock stall when he was being tossed to the saddle in the Ferris' colors. She had heard her father say that Joe had the natural gift of horsemanship without which no race rider can hope to enter the first division of his craft. He had that judgment of pace which cannot be acquired unless it is born in a man. but which, if it be a natural endowment, ticks in the brain like a split-second watch. He had the hands which could nurse and support a mount's head with a sort of iron gentleness, and the infectious spirit which instills courage into the heart of a horse. He was humanely sparing of rawhide and rowel, but when it was necessary to rouse and drive his mount with the whip, his stroke was perfectly timed to the take-off of the stride. These were high qualities, and as such Ferris appreciated them, but his interest in the promising young race rider was wholly impersonal. Such aids were essential to successful racing and if Joe developed in accordance with his promise, he would at some day not distant command a salary which many professional men might envy. But after all he would be only a glorified servant.

The girl had noted something else in the boy, and it was something more personal. Now, as he lay in his bandages with a pale face, that quality seemed more pronounced, more visible. These features were unlike those of most of the wizened urchins who trooped out in response to the saddling bell, clad in their liveries of silks and tack.

Here were steady, thoughtful eyes set under a well-shaped forehead and a mouth modeled to sensitiveness. For all his skill, he did not seem to belong

here. He struck her as having that quiet candor of manner and that unassuming self-confidence which do not spring from stable soil. There was a winning quality in his smile and a shyness in the sudden flush of his pale cheeks as she set down on the table by his bedside a small bunch of flowers.

"It was terrible," declared the girl simply, as she shuddered in memory. "I didn't see how you could come out of it alive."

"I guess I was just lucky," he answered diffidently, for he had never before received such an attention from such a girl—and she was an unusually pretty girl.

She talked easily and he answered rather shyly, and it seemed all too short a time until she had gone away.

Shannon Wiley still sat in the room a half hour after their departure, and he noticed that the jockey lay silent, but that his eyes lingered on the flowers by his bed. They were deep with some unexpressed thought; and the old gambler frowned as he interpreted.

"Well, you played lucky at that, Joe my lad," he observed at length. "You won't be able to ride for a while, but you'll be as sound as a gold piece when you get out of that casing."

The boy's brows gathered in an uneasy pucker.

"If there was any other way I could make a living," he said, "I wouldn't ever want to ride again."

The man whose whole life had centered about the race track cast a quick and piercing glance at his protégé; but if the boy's words disturbed him, he gave no sign.

"What would you do if you had your choice, son?" he inquired in a matter-of-fact tone.

For a little while there was no answer, and the eyes on the pillow were clouded by a deep embarrassment; but at length the voice came, with a sort of obdurate vehemence.

"I'd like to—to be a writer," Joe said, as though he were confessing a clear, but guilty ambition.

And as though accepting the statement in the same spirit, Shannon Wiley responded with dispassionate profanity: "A writer—good Lord!"

Joe's lips twitched, then tightened painfully; but after an interval, he went on:

"I'm sorry, Uncle Shan, if I said something foolish. I reckon I couldn't write anything, anyhow. I'm an exercise boy—but Masefield was a bartender once."

"I never heard of Masefield, but I didn't mean what you think, son," the man hastened to assure him. "I never wrote anything but tickets myself, though I've managed to make a pretty good living at that. You may have the stuff for all I know—or you may not. If you were breaking out all over with literary genius, I wouldn't know any more about it than a rabbit knows about French—and I mean an American rabbit, at that."

The boy in the bed offered no argument. After all, his ambitions seemed preposterous when they had been put into the starkness of words.

"But I do know something about race tracks," went on the man evenly, "and I've brought you up in the only school I could teach in. I do know that first-rate jockeys are about as rare as first-rate poets. And I do know that you've got the stuff and got it right. Even now with the apprentice bug against your name, you can ride with the best of them. It would be a pity to waste a great race rider trying to make a bum writer. The scrap heap of life is littered with damn poets and artists that have themselves doped wrong."

"I was a pretty good bug-jockey—up to yesterday," Joe made observation. and now the note of confession was more self-abasing than before. "But how do I know I'll ever get my

nerve back?" He paused, then closed his eyes, and his face became drawn with shame. "I might as well come clean. I'm scared. I hate to say it, but I'm scared to ride again—and I was never scared before."

Shannon Wiley glanced out of the window. His face was immobile and he answered with a quiet evenness:

"You're a liar, Joe. I mean you're lying to yourself. If you were yellow, you wouldn't admit it. I know something about nerve in horses and men. You're high-strung and you doubt yourself, but you aren't any quitter. I've watched you and I know." He paused, then added: "I know, but you don't; and you must to prove it to yourself. That's why you've got to go on riding—for a while longer, anyhow."

The gambler broke off and took several turns across the room; then he stopped and spoke slowly:

"I took charge of you when you were hardly more than a weanling, son. I hadn't any family to raise you in, but I thought that even an old rounder like me could do better by you than an orphan asylum. You aren't related to me and I haven't ever adopted you, but I know all about you. Your blood lines are sound enough—and game enough. You were just born broke, that's all. I've had my own notions about raising a boy. I thought hard work oughtn't to hurt him. I've brought you up around the race track because that's where I've had to be, but I've kept an eye on you, and my eye has had some training."

"You've been mighty good to me, Uncle Shan."

"Oh no, just decent, that's all. I've given you fairish sort of schooling. People haven't been able to dope us out exactly—you and me, and I never explained. Couldn't see that it was any of their business."

"I never quite doped it out myself," the boy admitted. "But I know that I owe you everything I've ever had."

"That's all right, son. Now I'm telling you some more. In my own thoughts you have always been like a son. When I cross over to whatever comes next, all I have in the bank or anywhere else will be yours. I've been worth several fortunes and I've been down and out more than once. Which I'll be when I die, I don't know. That depends on how the dice fall. You take that chance, along with me; but if I'm more conservative than I used to be, it's because I'm thinking of your future."

The boy nodded his head and a sudden bewilderment swept him.

"Of course I'll do what you say," he made obedient declaration. "If it hadn't been for you——"

But the gambler jerked his head positively.

"I just want to lay my cards down on the table with you," he explained. "I'm going to insist on your riding again—because I'm not going to let you be bluffed. That would leave a scar on your self-respect and would spoil a natural-born race rider. I'm going to give you better chances for education from now on, so that you can go as far as you like along that line. You're seventeen now. You can go on making the best of being a pigskin artist until you come of age. Then you can decide whether to keep on or to switch to some other kind of artist. That will be up to you. You let me ride out my theory of raising a lad to the finish—that is, until you're a man, and I won't try to force you any further. I'll stake you the best I can. and you can choose your route. Is that a fair way to make book on the event?"

"It's fair and then some, Uncle Shan."

"All right, then." The man came around and sat down by the bed. His voice was rough to conceal a burst of feeling. "Don't let high-strung nerves fool you—or buffalo you, son. If

you're yellow, I'm the King of Italy, and if you ain't as good as any other man, then Sysonby was a goat."

CHAPTER III.

LUNCH COUNTER FOR TWO.

SHANNON WILEY looked out but made no comment as he watched Joe through his hospital days. The boy was reading with an avid concentration, and this reading seemed to embrace, in the catholicity of its interest, everything except those columns of the newspapers which dealt with the doings of the race track. The boy had not again alluded to the shaking of his nerve, and this reticence gave Wiley food for thought.

Among many horsemen it was held as an axiom that the jockey who has once gone down in the welter of a bad bone-crushing accident will never rise again to full trustworthiness. He will not, it was contended, take boldly those hazardous chances which must sometimes be seized with instant resolution. These "race-track lawyers" could cite the chapter and verse for their authority. Such a boy might race as keenly as mustard where the going was clear, but where two must fight for a narrow gap and one push through the thin fissure of a jam, the boy who remembered his injuries would be the boy to "take up" and ease off. That was the often-reiterated theory, and like all theories it had its core of truth and its fringe of folly.

Wiley himself was contemptuous of all such sweeping generalities. He had survived in a hazardous and precarious business because of his gift for divining when to scrap and discard all hard-and-fast rules and trust his instinct. He recognized, too, the sharp demarcation between physical courage and moral valor, and because of that recognition he did not despair when he realized that Joe was wrestling with an unshaken dread of the day which would require of him the donning of tack and silks, the knotting of his reins for the parade to the post.

When the boy was again well enough to begin riding in exercise, he resumed his gallops in the working "sets" much as though he had never been absent. His hands had lost nothing of their lightly applied strength, and horses responded to the confidence which he was always able to establish through the telepathy of the tautly stretched rein.

But this was, after all, no real test. In exercise work there were no swift or daring decisions to be made as to whether an opening or closing rift between saddle skirt and saddle skirt was wide enough to let a horse through—or narrow enough to send them all into a struggling welter.

It was at Saratoga in the month of August that Wiley casually made the announcement which Joe had been awaiting—and dreading.

"I'm going to start Semper next Saturday," he said, "and you'll have the leg up."

Joe nodded, and less shrewdly observant eye than Wiley's might not have noticed the sudden catch in his breath.

"Semper may not be in the money," went on the owner, in matter-of-fact fashion. "He needs a start or two more before he's full ready. Let him run his own race and don't force him too hard. Keep him in the clear and, if need be, take him around the outside of the field. But ride him out and do the best you can."

In the jockey room where he awaited the post call that afternoon, the boy's face was masklike, as if there was a certain pallor in its cheeks that might have been chargeable to his long convalescence.

At the beautiful course of the spa where American racing celebrates its most brilliant month, the horses are walked under the green spread of noble trees instead of over the tanbark of a

roofed paddock; and here, while Shannon Wiley waited beside his starter, he was joined by Jerry Ferris, his daughter, Leslie, and a group of guests.

The eastern turfman had no representative of his own in that race, and with a polite interest he inquired:

"What about it, Mr. Wiley? Is this one of yours going to earn brackets?"

Wiley shook his head.

"Not likely," he answered briefly. "He's a fair sort of plater in this company, as you know; but he needs a race or two yet. He'll do his best, but if he takes the heat, he'll surprise me."

"Just in for the work, what?"

"Partly that," Shannon told him, "but chiefly to start Joe out with an easy ride. It's his first race since his smash-up. I'm entering Semper because he'll run his own race and get the boy over his stage fright—if he has any."

Ferris nodded.

"Good idea," he approved. "I'll keep an eye on the boy. I've been wondering whether his accident would break his nerve."

The Easterner turned and beckoned to his daughter.

"Leslie," he said, "the boy who had the bad spill with Vulcan at Churchill Downs is riding again in this race. You remember him—the lad that we called on at the hospital."

The girl answered in as matter-of-fact fashion as though she had not already read the jockey board:

"Yes, of course I remember him, dad. Let's wait and wish him luck."

The call sounded and the boys filed out of the jockey room. Joe Bonnie came to the head of his mount and inquired evenly:

"Any post instructions, sir?"

Shannon Wiley's hand fell for a moment on the slight shoulder. He found that it betrayed no tremor but was stiffly tensed, and his own hand gave it a quick pressure of reassurance.

"No instructions except what you already have, Joe. Keep him free of interference and let him run his own race to the stretch head. Then ride him out."

Leslie Ferris smiled and held out her hand, and the boy's face flooded with color. He felt that she must know the fashion in which the sight of her—the first glimpse since she had visited him in the hospital—speeded up his heartbeat to an unruly hammering. But she only said:

"We stopped to wish you the best of luck. They tell me this is your first race since—since I saw you last."

"Thank you," he answered. "Yes, it's my first race. It was mighty good of you to come."

Then he was bending up a booted foot for Wiley's hand and was being tossed to the saddle; and a moment later he was riding out to the track with a fear of horses, never known before, fighting for acknowledgment in his heart and being resolutely fought back.

The post position which fell to Semper's lot was well to the outside, and the boy had hardly ridden his mount up to the webbing when the starter released the trigger and the field was away.

Usually a quick breaker, Joe had been a trifle dazed with the conflict of his feelings; but the old stager under him had plunged from his walking stride into a rocketlike get-away which shook his rider as though he were taking an unexpected hurdle. With the violence of that forward flinging, the boy came back to his old self, and taking a firm hold on Semper's head, began thrusting him forward and inward, to cut with wary swiftness across the line toward the rail. For the moment he forgot everything except the racing instincts which dominated and guided his efforts in that early task of jockeying for position.

Then as the outspread field began to bunch and crowd for the first turn, as the horses seemed drawn irresistibly

and dangerously into a converging vortex, he felt like a man defenselessly caught in a stampede and being irresistibly crushed at its center pressure. For the part of an instant Joe tasted poignant and sickening terror. He had to choose now between taking up and losing his place of vantage or riding at the core of the congestion and trusting to work through.

Then he thought of the thousands of eyes that were on him—of the general doubt of a once-broken jockey, and to his consciousness all those eyes became a single pair set in the face of a girl. He clucked to his mount, threw him straight forward in the tight-packing mêlée and—shut his eyes.

How long he held them shut he did not know, yet his sense of pace and distance told him that the turn had been made with nothing down. He opened his eyes and found himself leading the field with the rail position, and with a black horse running almost level at his saddle skirts. Then his mind was functioning again as clearly and consecutively as a clock in a church steeple. It was too early to be letting Semper lead the procession. He could not carry that pace the whole route and last it out. That meant throwing away the race in an early prodigality of effort. Gradually Joe eased back to third place and gave Semper a breather while the front runners carried the heart-taxing burden of the pace making. The gallop through the back stretch was easy sailing and the banking round of the far turn brought no fear. The rest had here been drawn out into a straggling queue, and Semper straightened for home running in third place as straight as a string.

But the horse had picked his own way, relying wholly on his own courage through the drive of the first fight, and now, short of full readiness by a race or two, he began to falter and shorten stride.

"Let him run his own race, but ride him out in the stretch." Those had been Joe's orders. Semper had so far given of his best without much help, but the stretch struggle remained, and it is in the stretch that races are won or lost. Joe sat down and rode. He called on the old plater for all that he had, and Semper gave it. He steadied out of his flagging weariness and finished valiantly on what he had left, under the support of magically encouraging hands. He picked up and put away the second horse, then challenged the first, looking him in the eye and measuring stride for stride. But the leader was not to be easily displaced, and the boy who piloted him was "pouring leather."

Through the last sixteenth, those two fought it out hammer and tongs, nod for nod. Joe Bonnie did not draw his whip, but his hand ride was superb. Fear lay behind him now and self-vindication beckoned ahead. In the last yards of the pell-mell drive he lifted Semper and threw his nose first across the wire.

It was as he walked back from weighing-out that Wiley fell into step with him.

"I didn't mean to have you push the horse into that jam at the turn," he said. "That was a right dangerous thing to do; but you got through all right, and you rode a nice race."

The boy looked up and flushed.

"I didn't push him into it, Uncle Shan," he made shamefaced confession. "Semper pushed me into it. I had my eyes shut."

Shannon Wiley nodded and suppressed his smile.

"I thought maybe you would have," he made matter-of-fact response. "That's why I put you up on Semper your first time out. Sort of figured he could make his own running to the back stretch, and figured that after that you'd do the rest."

Leslie Ferris was the nominal mistress of her father's cottage at Saratoga, as she was the mistress of his town house, of Maple Court on Long Island, and of the winter establishment at Aiken. But because she was not yet a débutante, the social duties of administering the household rested chiefly in other hands.

When the day came for her launching in society, she would have to take up these responsibilities. When, instead of being so much away at school and college, she was more constantly at home—that is, of course, until she made a suitable marriage—Jerry Ferris would find it necessary to inaugurate certain changes in his own régime. To say that he was devoted to his daughter would be understatement; and Mrs. Mooney, the housekeeper who had been attached to the household since before the days of the divorce, gave it more vigorous expression.

"Mr. Ferris thinks Miss Leslie is a piece of the moon," Mrs. Mooney was wont to declare to her intimates. Yet she sometimes shook her head in sage, if unexpressed, doubt that all was going well.

Sometimes in Leslie's absences from home there had been parties at which the ladies were not the same ladies who graced more formal occasions. "Ladies," Mrs. Mooney suspected, "that don't show up when the others are there—and wouldn't mix well if they did." Yes, Mr. Ferris was a fine gentleman, and his housekeeper would be the last to deny it; but in certain particulars and at certain times he was a gay gentleman with an eye in head for the women, and a fondness for untrammeled pleasures. After all, it was a pity, thought this good soul, that the sweet lamb of a child didn't have a mother as well as a father to bring her up—not that she could be finer than she was, but that she had a right to be mothered.

Leslie liked the month at Saratoga. Perhaps she did not seek to analyze just why. In town there were more varied pleasures, but they were also more hedged with formalities. On Long Island there were outdoor amusements, and best of all, the sea. Aiken was nice, with its long-leaf pines, its mocking-bird tunefulness and its winter frolic; but Saratoga had a charm distinctively its own. There was something which laid its thrall on the imagination about the little town that awoke out of an eleven-month drowsing to be, for the four weeks of August, transformed into a mecca of sport and fashion.

In the calendar of horse racing, it was like a period of high tide and full moon; and she had heard that this had been true for so many years that great traditions hung about the meeting. It was at Saratoga, with the spring and early summer already gone into history, that questions of championship in horseflesh narrowed and crystallized to concrete issues. It was here that the yearling sales took place and that the baby races shared with their elder brethren the focused attention of horsemen.

At Saratoga one seemed to live with the horses, in a village whose single main street was the thread on which were strung all the beads of colorful humanity.

Perhaps what the girl really liked best, without fully understanding it, was that this life was democratic and the world closer knit. A sage old turfman once said of August at the Spa that it was the occasion when great horses and the men and women who loved them "met face to face, as individuals."

Often Leslie rose before dawn and hurried alone to the race track, and though such freedom of action would have been frowned on elsewhere, it was circumspect enough here. Even in the early chill of that early hour, she was sure to find along the rail some two or three ardent horsewomen who were

matrons as prominent in society as in their racing interests.

Out there in the dawn mists things were at first shadowy and unreal with the eerie charm of the impalpable. About the stretch and the back stretch, with upturned collars gathered the professional "clockers," keen-eyed men who at a glance could identify every horse in training, and whose stop-watches caught for the use of trainers and the bookmakers the time of each noteworthy gallop. From the nostrils of the earliest colts to appear, the breath came in pale little clouds that hovered in the chill; and the thud of the first galloping hoofs sounded faint, like those of ghost horses, but soon gathered volume to a steady, rapid drumbeat. As the light strengthened and the hills stood out green, many wakening colors came brilliantly to life, and Ettle Lake shone as a pool of kindled amber.

On one of these mornings Joe Bonnie in sweater, boots and breeches came out to the back-stretch rail, still shivering slightly in the dawn fog, and found himself standing shoulder to shoulder with Leslie Ferris. The two of them were alone save for clumps of people some twenty yards away; and to him she seemed amazingly beautiful, with the bloom heightened in her cheeks by the briskness of the air. For a moment he was overcome by a sense of diffidence, and perhaps he might not have plucked up his courage to speak to her at all, had she not turned just then and recognized him with the friendliest of nods.

"Good morning, Mr. Bonnie," she accosted him gravely. And because he was not often addressed as "Mr. Bonnie," and because he had canonized her in his thoughts, he flushed helplessly.

If Leslie noticed that embarrassment, she gave no indication. She did notice —as she had noticed before—that he had nice eyes, looking with clear straightforwardness out of a clean-cut face, and that he wore his riding clothes more like a polo player than a jockey.

"That was a pretty race you rode yesterday," she told him. "Father said it was a million-dollar ride in a thousand-dollar scramble."

Joe tingled pleasurably, but the personal note of the conversation disturbed him, and he somewhat hastily changed the subject. He felt that he was being complimented under false pretenses and that he ought to tell her how panic had ridden with him. He would tell her, he resolved, when he knew her better.

"It's right early for you to be out here," he suggested. "Generally it's only the people that have to come—or are pretty enthusiastic—that turn out at dawn this way."

She nodded and smiled at him.

"I know," she said, "but I am enthusiastic. I get a great kick out of it. It's wonderful to see the mists clear and the colors come to life."

Leslie paused a moment, then she asked:

"Have you ever gone duck shooting on the Susquehanna flats?"

"No," he answered, feeling acutely the limitations of his experience, "I never have."

"I don't care so much for the shooting," she went on, "but I get the same sort of kick out of the dawn, At first everything is gray and silent over the water. Then there are pale streaks of light, and even before that you hear the throb of wings. Soon the sky gets faintly rosy and the sound of the flights are like a muffled drumbeat. There it's flying wings, and here it's flying feet; but it makes me feel the same way."

"You have imagination, haven't you?"

"I don't know. Have I?"

He nodded gravely. He wanted desperately to tell her of his ambition to write things and how vital the gift of

imagination seemed to him, but he remembered that he could hardly hope to interest her in such personal aspirations, so he only raised his cap with the commonplace announcement that he must go to the Wiley barn and take out a two-year-old for a pipe opener.

The girl was smiling quietly to herself as she watched him exercise a fractious colt, and she looked on as he drew up at the end and quieted his mount with a caressing hand on its steaming neck and with low-voiced injunctions.

"Stand still, Big Son—be quiet, Big Son."

But when he had dismounted he came over to her again, drawn by her irresistible attraction.

"I guess you'll be getting back to your breakfast now, won't you?" he asked. "You ought to be ready for it after this cold hour."

The girl laughed and shook her head positively.

"I'm not going to waste time going home just now," she assured him. "I think I'll just have a cup of coffee and then go across the road for a look at the yearlings."

He hesitated then, but her cordiality emboldened him to a bright-eyed eagerness. He was still in the thrall of his diffidence and profoundly anxious to avoid a seeming of freshness, so he stammered a little as he suggested:

"There are some yearlings I'd like to show you if you'll let me—when you've finished your breakfast."

"Have you had yours yet?" she inquired. He admitted that he had not. "I generally get a bite at the lunch stand over there," he made explanation, "where you sit on a stool at the counter."

"That's where I'm going," she told him promptly. "It's the only place around here, isn't it?"

The boy looked at her in adoring amazement, and a few minutes later the two were perched on stools with heavy crockery before them, rubbing elbows with stable hands and trainers, but also with an occasional society matron and nabob of the turf.

CHAPTER IV.

"LAY OFF THE FERRIS GIRL."

SOMETIMES there is a racing season through which the name of one horse and one jockey are woven as warp and woof into a pattern of conspicuous accomplishment. The place of Joe Bonnie as a race rider of merit had been firmly enough fixed before the two-year-old colt, Hazardous, blazed across the sky of his division, emerging from obscurity to end up as juvenile champion. But it was in that summer and fall that certain sporting writers chose to graduate the boy out of the class of sterling young riders into the more exclusive company of "our few best" and even in more enthusiastic moments to allude to him as "that coming rival to America's premier pockey."

Out of a yearling sale at Saratoga, Shannon Wiley had bought the iron-gray youngster, Hazardous, for a thousand dollars, and had been soundly laughed at for his purchase. Those of us who follow the news of the race tracks remember how until a few years back, the gray thoroughbred almost disappeared from the turf, and how unfashionable that color became. We also remember how of late there has come about a sort of recrudescence of gray-coated colts and fillies demonstrating stake quality, and how most of them have traced back to Le Sancy through Roi Herode and Stefan the Great.

That sage old judge of horseflesh, Shannon Wiley, responded only with his chillingly cool smile when they laughed at him. He fancied that blood and was willing to back his judgment. He fancied, too, something about this young individual's conformation and the "look of eagles" in his eye.

Since the days when the market place of open bookmaking had been closed down and he had entered into the list of racing owners, Wiley had never sent to the barrier under his own silks any winner of a Kentucky Derby, a Belmont, nor—in the two-year-old division—of a Hopeful or a Futurity. He had yet to stand in the judges' kiosk as owner of the winner of any one of these major classics where governors present trophy cups and victorious jockeys receive gold spurs.

Now, in the teeth of ridicule, he hoped that this thousand-dollar purchase might afford him that long-denied gratification. After two or three bleakly disappointing races in which the gentleman who had laughed at him, laughed more raucously than ever, and in which his own face remained expressionless, the gray two-year-old struck his stride and began to "strut his stuff." He had suddenly acquired a belated interest in the business for which he had been specifically and grandly bred. He romped home first at long odds ahead of a field of mediocre maidens, then showed his heels with an equal ease to a group of more pretentious rivals. After that he began a steady climb toward the pinnacle, always with Joe Bonnie nursing his head and booting him home, and usually with the tufted whip undrawn.

It was at Saratoga that the gray colt set his pennant of victory waving most triumphantly. Meeting the classiest of his age, and seemingly indifferent to weight, distance or track condition, he romped gayly home victor in the Adirondack, in the Albany, and in the great Hopeful. But at Belmont Park, shortly after, in the race upon which every horseman sets his hope in chief, Hazardous disgraced himself. In the classic Futurity, the stalwart young gray upset every principle of form and behaved as though he had never before been to the races.

Already he was being acclaimed as unbeatable and heralded as a prodigy of foot and stamnia. The oralists laid such a short price against his name in that event that, had the colt been less enshrined in the hearts of racegoers, his defeat would have lost them little. As it was, in spite of the prohibitive odds, the sharpshooters and the "talent" could see nothing but Hazardous, and held one to three a conservative and safe investment. It was like picking up money on the street, they told one another.

Joe Bonnie rode the gray to the barrier in the parade of that historic stake with as great an assurance of success as he had ever known. Leslie had shaken hands in the paddock and the quick pressure of her fingers had left him tingling. Hazardous was razor-edged in his fitness. He was ready to run for a king's ransom and, barring an accident, he seemed only going through with a required formality before entering the chalked circle of victory and being crowned king of the juvenile division.

Wiley had been outspoken. He was out to win, he declared, and expected to win.

Hazardous had no excuse. The field left the barrier evenly and fairly, and Joe Bonnie had his charge away on his toes. He was neither bumped nor interfered with and when the field emerged from the starting chute he was winging out at the fore of the pack with that effortless stride which had become famous for its smooth and stifling speed. The crowd tore out its throat linings in confident delight, and then, halfway home, Hazardous abruptly shortened his stride, chucked his job, and closed up like a jackknife. From a place of vantage which nothing had threatened, he dropped shamefully back into the ruck. The boy who had ridden him in all his victorious starts could at first not believe it. Patiently and with

most consummate art, he nursed the head which had grown dully ponderous against the bit; the head which had always before been carried high with ears pricking forward. Refusing to give way to excitement and take recourse to the whip, he cajoled and urged—and it went for less than nothing.

Then the jockey drew his whip, and cautiously but vigorously he stung the flagging flank with one perfectly timed stroke. The colt laid back his ears in mulish sullenness and faded from the picture. Some perverse whim had entered into him and obsessed him. The "nickel horses" of the claiming races could that day have made sport of him. He did not want to run, and all the skill and patience of the hands that guided him and the heels that booted him were of no avail.

When the boy dismounted with a bleakly forlorn face, the crowds along the rail booed him mercilessly. The stewards summoned him to the stand and asked a pointed question. They even called in the patrol judge, and while this inquisition took place, the crowds around the kiosk growled and roared its outraged displeasure. But the patrol judge spoke unequivocally:

"The colt just quit cold," he testified. "The boy was giving him a million-dollar ride every step of the way. Hazardous simply refused him."

Shannon Wiley, waiting below for his jockey to come down, stood with a stony face. He was pretending not to hear certain libelous things that were being spoken of him.

"What do you expect when a crooked gambler gets hold of a good colt?" demanded a flushed loser. "He doesn't want to win at one to three. He can make more money stringing the suckers. He was probably playing something else, himself. He'll cut loose with his colt next time when the odds are juicier—and when the public is looking up the chimney."

Wiley had heard much of that sort of thing. He could bear it now. He did not take the trouble to proclaim that his heart had been set on a triumph he had never enjoyed, or that his own faith had been backed to the tune of a disastrous loss.

"I watched it," he said briefly to Joe as he walked beside the sweating boy back to the jockey room. "A colt that has always been sweet tempered and lion-hearted chucked it like a goat today. There's a rotten streak in him we never suspected."

"I don't understand it," declared the jockey almost chokingly. "I can't believe it will last."

"That's what we've got to find out," Wiley made grim response. "We'll give him other chances, but he ain't what we thought he was; that's flat."

The men who flock daily to the race track and ply the handbookers with their avid trade between times take little account of many unseen elements. These are the gentry who talk out of the sides of their faces, and they are ever ready to declare that every racer which has cost them a losing ticket "was not strictly kosher."

They declared it now with fervor. But in that particular upset of all form, a thing had happened the significance of which had escaped even the argus-eyed watchfulness of Shannon Wiley and the devoted attention of Joe Bonnie.

From the "Three L Circuit" of Kentucky, from Lexington, Louisville, and Latonia to the Metropolitan area, from there to the Spa at Saratoga and back again to the tracks around New York, Wiley's stable had traveled with its ordinary complement of stable hands and barn impedimenta. A few stable mascots had gone along with the rest as camp followers accompany an army. An Airedale puppy usually sprawled near the tack room, but little attention had been accorded the small, stub-tailed

kitten which performed ridiculous antics about the barn and selected as his particular shrine the stall of Hazardous. Callous negroes saw him there and constantly expected to pick up a small crushed body from underfoot. In keeping with this expectancy, a black boy had facetiously named the stray kitten "Gw-ine-die-soon," which, being too cumbersome a name for convenient service, had been shortened to the ominous monosyllable "Soon."

After the free and disdainful fashion of cats, Soon came and went at will, fending for himself, purring contentedly when he chose and stropping his sides against whatsoever object, animate or inanimate, recommended itself to his momentary favor. Casual human kicks he endured or avoided as luck decreed. Human caresses he accepted or repudiated according to his mood. He was ubiquitous or absent in the exact degree of his own independent choice. So it fell about that in the excitement which ran flood-high on the eve of the Futurity no one noticed that for a long twenty-four hours, Soon had been A. W. O. L.

When the statement is made that no one noticed his absence, it applies only to human beings, and excludes an important actor in the cast. The gray colt upon which all eyes were turned, the colt upon which hundreds of thousands of dollars were being bet by word of mouth and over telegraph wires, had not only noted the absence but had fretted his soul over it. He went to the track brooding over a bereavement and mourning a lost companionship. He was disconsolate and suddenly soured, and to him, that afternoon, the Futurity meant nothing.

When Hazardous, whose mood had meanwhile emerged from its doldrums, toyed derisively with every presumptuous contender to win the rich Pimlico Futurity, breezing light-heartedly to victory under a double wrap, the grumblers read in that bright vindication only fresh proof that to gain long odds, a crooked owner and a crooked jockey had whipsawed the trusting public.

"What chance has an honest man got," inquired these gentry to whom "honesty" was only a relative term, "to beat a combination like that?" Neither these critics nor the stable connections gave thought to the circumstance that a wanderer had returned—that a colt had come back.

But the season came to its close and Hazardous retired to his winter of rest at the farm, crowned and acknowledged as champion of the two-year-olds and the winter favorite for the Preakness and the Kentucky Derby of the next spring.

"Joe Bonnie," wrote one of the sporting editors in reviewing those chapters of turf history, "has not only taken rank with the first few American jockeys but has placed himself in that small group whose names can be suitably mentioned in the same breath with 'Snapper' Garrison and Tod Sloan. It is rumored that tempting contracts have been offered him, but no statement has been forthcoming as to whether he will accept employment next season as first-string boy for one of the major establishments, or whether he will free lance in the saddle. Either way, he will go far. Young Bonnie is a gentlemanly lad of exemplary habits. He is modest, level-headed and trustworthy. And in Shannon Wiley, that picturesque turf character who knows the racing game from A to Izzard, he has a shrewd adviser and mentor."

Leslie Ferris saw that notice and clipped it from the paper.

Joe saw it, too, but he did not clip it.

There was a reason why he could remain modest even though he had become accustomed to the applause of the massed grand stands. He acknowledged

that to be among the most prominent of any class brings its momentary thrill, and he saw clearly enough the abundant rewards which the future held for Bonnie the jockey. There was an intoxication in such success, but all that only served to commit him more irretrievably to a life from which he sought an escape. Had he failed as a jockey he might with a better grace go to the man who had befriended him and argue for the chance to venture on a new career. The day upon which he was to make that choice was not now far away, and every new victory on the race track made it the more palpably perverse and foolish to choose a turning from assured success into untried ways. Yet it was an untried way toward which he yearned.

Leslie Ferris haunted his thoughts and dominated his dreams. When they met at the race track, she was there as the daughter of a man to whom racing was a hobby and an indulgence. Joe was there as a boy who weighed in and weighed out on the official scales and who wore the livery of the professional rider. Joe could not think of life without her. He could not tolerate the thought of a status definitely committed to limitations which would always bar him from her by an inflexible, even if unmentioned, class distinction. Yet he had in such a life, and only in such a life, the certainty of success, even of self-support. As to what she thought about him, he could only guess, and it was best not to guess too hard.

Certainly, Joe reflected, he had reason to be modest, as he received the adulation of admirers who turn for their heroes to the sporting page, and pass by all other fields of human endeavor.

Shannon Wiley was out by the barns and paddocks of his Fayette County farm one morning when the first of the spring-training activities were stirring to life. Through the winter his horses had filled out, and he felt that he had something more tangible here in the way of real promise than he had ever been able to reckon on before.

Soon his two-year-olds, still soft of muscle and high in flesh, would be hardening, and the creases of action would begin to show in their flanks. In the three-year-old division he had a Derby candidate which, barring misadventure, would go to the post one of the prime choices—a colt which had wound up his previous season as two-year-old champion. In the winter racing at New Orleans a brown youngster called Gangway had distinguished himself with some brilliance, and there was some talk of him as belonging at the top of the form for the Derby; but that did not disturb Wiley. What did trouble him at times was a memory of the unaccountable and perverse streak that his own youngster had shown in the Futurity. But so far, Hazardous was training kindly and showing no emotional aberrations.

And Wiley had another asset that many greater turfmen envied him. The saying was current where turfites gathered that, "The best horse in Shannon Wiley's barn is Joe Bonnie"—and, it might have been added, "The best horse in almost any man's barn."

Shannon was sitting on the freshly whitewashed fence of a paddock lot ruminating on these matters, when he saw a car of European build draw up and recognized Jerry Ferris, whose Kentucky racing establishment lay a few miles away.

The man who had been a professional gambler did not thrill to any pleasurable excitement as he recognized his visitors. One could hardly call Ferris supercilious of manner; he was too studiously courteous and correct for that. Yet his bearing carried an unpleasant hint of aloofness. In a subtle fashion which eluded exact description, the Easterner conveyed the impression of a

high dignitary seeking by his democracy of manner to put at his ease one less the patrician than himself. That sort of thing didn't go very well with Shannon Wiley, and as he climbed reluctantly down from his perch on the fence he grumbled under his breath:

"High-hatting me, I reckon. That's old stuff; I thought it went out with the war."

Aloud the ex-bookmaker offered matter-of-fact greeting.

"Good morning, Mr. Ferris. Didn't know you were in Kentucky."

"I ran down to look things over at the farm," explained Ferris, "and to have a talk with you."

Wiley nodded noncommittally, and the visitor put a direct inquiry:

"Would you entertain any sort of proposition for the sale of Hazardous?"

Another man than Ferris would have approached such a question more circuitously, and another man than Wiley would have satisfied his curiosity by measuring the blades of bargaining before making his response final.

"No," said Wiley, and he said it curtly.

"I said, 'any sort of proposition,'" the New Yorker reminded him. "That phrase opens a fairly broad field for negotiation."

"Negotiation means talking terms," responded the owner of the gray stallion. "When a man doesn't want to sell, terms don't interest him."

The face of the Crœsus hardened a little—not only with disappointment, but also with a trace of resentment for the bluntness with which this fellow had cut him short. It savored of disrespect.

"I didn't know that you indulged in sentimentalities about horses," he suggested with an almost imperceptible irony. "I thought I'd heard you quoted as saying that no horse was worth more than he could be reasonably expected to earn."

"Yeah," came the casual response, "I've said that."

"Yet you can decide 'not for sale' without considering the offer."

"At the present time, I do. Yes."

"And you don't regard that as sentimental?"

A wintry smile crept into Wiley's eyes and faded out of them again.

"I've always held that a thoroughbred horse was a racing tool pure and simple. I've never fallen hard for all this bunk about improving the breed. It's my idea that a man might as well feel mushy over a pet pack of cards. When a deck gets greasy or ragged it's time to throw it away and get another—unless it's a trick deck." He paused and then added as if in afterthought: "And if it's a trick deck you'd better throw it away before some bird gets wise and raises hell."

The distinguished face of Jerry Ferris mirrored his strong distaste for such a sentiment. He himself quite properly drew, between sportsmen and sports, the line which separates the sheep from the goats. But it was futile to bandy ethical argument with a man whose background had been that of the bookmakers' stall.

"Sorry," he said crisply. "I had hoped we might make a deal. After your answer, I don't have to ask whether Hazardous has wintered well. Of course you think highly of him for the Derby."

"It's early yet to say," came the guarded response; "a lot of things may happen between now and the middle of May. But I reckon I'll have a shot at that race before I talk of selling." He paused, then added: "You call me sentimental. If the colt goes wrong between now and then, ask me again and see how sentimental I am."

"If the colt goes wrong," was the short rejoinder, "I'll hardly be interested in him."

"No, I guess that's right."

"Then that brings me to my second proposition. You hold young Bonnie's riding contract. I'd be willing to pay him a good retainer for second call."

Wiley nodded, this time less forbiddingly.

"We'll have to talk that over with Joe," he said thoughtfully. "There's only one snag that we might run into, as far as I know."

"A snag?"

"Yes. You see Joe comes of age pretty soon; and when he's twenty-one, he's his own man. He's got a sort of a settled notion that he may want to quit riding."

"Quit riding!" The exclamation was one of shocked credulity. "But he's just getting ready to reap his harvest. He's not having to hunt his health keeping his weight down yet. He's as hard as nails. What can his idea be?"

"That's what I asked him," Wiley answered indifferently. "He's got an itch to be a writer, I believe. Feels the urge—or something. Myself, I don't know how people get that way."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Ferris.

"Yeah, I said that too. But after all, it's Joe's own funeral."

"Not at all. You shouldn't let him make a fool of himself. What is this younger generation coming to?" The Easterner gave way to sudden heat. "They have no sense of responsibility or proportion. Here is one of the best jockeys in America, where good jockeys are few enough. He's capable of making more money than a bank president—and he wants to write! What makes him suspect he can do it?"

"Search me!" rejoined Wiley. "But we didn't know he could *ride* till he showed us, as far as that's concerned. Maybe he'll switch mounts and show us again."

Ferris stood for a few moments looking off across the paddocks with clouded eyes. Then he turned his face again to the less aristocratic horseman; and now it was with an obvious effort that he smothered an inward anger.

"Where is the boy now? Do you know, Mr. Wiley?"

"Why, no. Not far away, I reckon."

"Well, I can tell you. He's riding horseback somewhere—with my daughter Leslie. She went out in riding togs after breakfast, and I learned just as I left the house, that Joe Bonnie was with her."

"Miss Ferris rides well," Wiley offered dispassionate comment; "she doesn't need a protector. But if she did, Joe would be a right safe riding companion."

Ferris flushed.

"No," he said, "she doesn't need a riding master. And if she did, I should prefer to choose him and pay him."

The hint was quite evident.

An ominously dark flash stole into Wiley's eyes; but it did not dwell there long, and its passing left his features again imperturbable. Ferris, too, felt that he had been betrayed into too explosive an emphasis, and he added in a changed note:

"Joe is a good boy. I know he's a sort of protégé of yours as well as an employee. But frankly, I don't want him playing around with my daughter. I want him very much to ride my horses—but——" He broke off and added concernedly: "I don't know how long this thing has been going on."

"Why don't you say all that to your girl instead of to me, Mr. Ferris?" inquired Wiley coldly.

Ferris flushed.

"I don't want to make the thing seem unduly important. Leslie belongs to this younger generation, too. They all seem to think the war was fought to free children from parental authority. If she's built up a romance about this boy, it would only kindle it for me to raise a ruction."

The father was palpably frightened. It was all very well to say that Leslie

was level-headed and could be depended upon; but youth is rarely level-headed when hot-hearted. It was no good to seek solace in the thought that her whole tradition and upbringing would safeguard her against a love affair out of her own class. He could recall unfortunate incidents in two families as prominent as his own whose daughters had eloped with chauffeurs and the like. These things may be unthinkable—but they happen every day.

"The war," suggested Shannon in an even voice, "didn't make you safe for democracy, did it?" Then he jerked his head. "Just the same," he added, "that's your business, not mine. I'll speak to Joe, and I expect you won't be troubled any more."

It was an hour later that he laid a hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Son," he said, "lay off the Ferris girl. Her father was over here and he doesn't think that you and I are in his class."

Joe's face flushed furiously red, and for a moment his lips trembled on the verge of passionate utterance. Then he answered with an abruptly recovered quiet:

"That doesn't go for you, Uncle Shan. But as to me, maybe he's right. Some day, perhaps—— But that's a long way off."

Wiley shrugged his shoulders.

"The girl's a kid yet, and he's responsible for her. Anyhow, you don't want to get in too deep before you're of age, yourself. After that, it's up to you. But stopping in time is sometimes a right wise play. There's a lot of heartache in—some things."

To be continued next week.

THE LOVE OF AH-HO-AP-PA

AH-HO-AP-PA was the daughter of that famous old chieftain, Spotted Tail, known far and wide as a born orator and diplomat. At Fort Laramie in the early '60s she became infatuated with a cavalry officer stationed there, and when he was killed in an expedition against the Sioux she lost all interest in life and shortly afterward died.

At the time of her death the band of Spotted Tail was encamped on the Powder River many miles from the fort, but she expressed a wish to her father that she be taken to the fort and buried beside the grave of Old Smoke, a great chieftain among the Sioux in former years. Complying with her wishes the band traveled to the fort and when fifteen miles away sent a runner with a message that Spotted Tail was coming to bury his daughter Ah-ho-ap-pa who had been well known and liked by the soldiers and civilians.

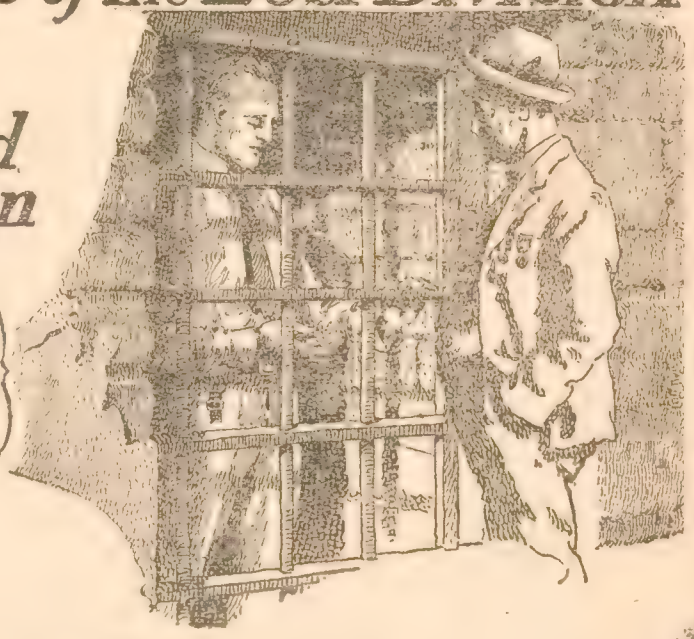
The commandant of the post, desiring the good will of Spotted Tail and his influence with his tribe, immediately sent an ambulance, with a company of cavalry in full uniform and two mountain howitzers with postillions in red chevrons, to escort the body to the fort. When two miles from the fort the garrison turned out and with the colonel at the head of the column, met and escorted them to the post.

All the Indian customs were followed at the old chief's request, but she was also given the honor of a full military burial service with the post band, flags, and detachment of troops. In 1875 Spotted Tail returned to Fort Laramie and was permitted to remove the remains to his reservation on Beaver Creek, saying that he desired to have all his people together.

Leguerre of the Lost Division

By Howard Fitzalan

{Without Portfolio}



Author of "The Sky-borer X," Etc.

Condemned to be shot, and no possible escape! Leguerre, the blasé diplomatic agent, faces his tightest predicament.

A COMPLETE STORY

IF anything, the steady scratching of the pencil lent a little more of strain to the silence. The gaunt, gray man at the shabby old desk, having pithily had his say, seemed resolved that the next speech should come from his visitor. Now he applied himself with an abstracted diligence to drawing, and the top sheet of the manila pad on his desk pull was crowding with a grotesque assortment of geometrical figures.

"Sort of an astrologer's chart, what? Or is it something really significant—in the futurist medium?"

Having lighted a cigarette and smoked the first half of it, the young man with the sleepy blue eyes—he was a person so exquisitely turned out that the small rear office had appeared even drabber and dustier since his coming—turned his attention critically to the mysterious art-form shaping on the brown block.

The artist pocketed the pencil and regarded his handiwork with a gloomy detachment.

"Dammit, Leguerre!" he grumbled. "Let's not get off our subject. I tell you again that you're not to look on this as an assignment from the division. I won't have it so, and my position's been made plain—elsewhere. I send no man out from this offce without at least a reasonable expectation of eventually seeing him back!"

Judge Gamaliel Gunther, once of the Federal bench and the United States attorney general's office, but latterly chief of the war-born intelligence control division, was habitually crisp in conversation, and on occasion pungent.

Leguerre, though he had served the I. C. D. through all the years of its ascendancy and its decline, had not before heard in his voice a ring so closely akin to vehemence. He sat straight and stared, until the cigarette had burned uncomfortably close to the fingers that held it.

"Deuce of a place to smoke, anyhow," he remarked, carefully treading out the sparks that had scattered from the suddenly released cigarette end. "The building should have been condemned directly after the Louisiana Purchase—what?"

Gunther waved off the further aside with a weary gesture.

"I'm grateful that they've let it stand," he said. "Otherwise they'd have the division on the sidewalk." He picked a paper packet out of a pigeon hole, and extracted from it a brittle, black cheroot.

"The thought you suggest," he added, with a quick and acid smile, "puts us nicely on our track again. I don't need to tell you, certainly, how close to the vanishing point they've brought down our appropriations. If for a course of years the masters of the budget have had me desperately conserving pen nibs and paper clips, perhaps it's in order that I should begin to think of conserving my people. Too precious few are left to me that I should willingly consent to gamble any one of them on what appears to be at best a forlorn hope."

There was understanding in Leguerre's nod.

"But," he mildly pointed out, "I've always rather fancied the forlorn-hope thing. It's a happy phrase—stirring bucks one up tremendously. They can call us the 'Lost Division'—but it's not exactly uncomplimentary, I mean to say, that more opulent departments should still turn to us when they find themselves at a loose end."

The quick smile came again.

"Perhaps not," Gunther admitted. "However, the agent I'd choose to handle this particular job of diplomacy would preferably be a colonel of marines—with his regiment not too far behind him. The neighbor department having already sent down one quasi-official minister without portfolio—and lost him—I'd say offhand that the time was ripe——"

Leguerre interrupted:

"You mentioned the man they sent. Maitland. I place him now. Pleasant little chap. And you mean to say he went into Costilloro and simply—vanished?"

"That's what seems to have happened. Hasn't been heard from since his second start out of Puerto Cabezo. Said he was bound down the coast, and that was the end of him. More than a month ago, too. So——"

Leguerre nodded again.

"One of those things. And Miss Laird hasn't an inkling yet of what became of him? That's the surprising part. I remember her as being quite as clever as she is good to look at."

Gunther tossed aside his manila pad and threw his striped-trousered legs over the desk pull.

"She is," he granted, settling back in his rust-stiffened swivel chair to the accompaniment of a fanfare of protesting squeals and groans. "To date she appears to have been the one adequate person in the picture. If they'd come to us in the first place, immediately after her code advices in this matter of Monteleone had been received, I'd have had a different feeling in regard to shipping you south."

He broke off and carefully lifted clear the tail of his long, tight-buttoned frock coat while he struck a match on his trouser leg.

"I'll outline the situation from the beginning," he resumed, when the dry cheroot was drawing. "Then you can form your own opinion, and decide if you want to tackle the job—keeping in

mind, if you please, that it'll be a voluntary effort on your part, subjecting you to control of another department. My position: I'll *lend* you—but damned if I'll send you!

"Well, there's Ann Laird, then. She's our logical starting point, for it was she who first got wind of the underlying rottenness of the situation in Costilloro. Ostensibly she's a fixture of the consular service, and last year she went to Puerto Cabezo to try to verify a number of suspicions which had begun to form in certain erudite heads here in Washington.

"Miss Laird, I gather, did her part of the job in first-rate fashion. She made contacts, amassed a rather amazing amount of information, and duly reported to her department; and, I dare say, very decently discharged her routine duties in the Puerto Cabezo consulate as well. Her departmental report, at any rate, indicated that President Monteleone has secretly allied himself with—let us say, that one of the dear overseas friends of America which in all likelihood will be the enemy nation of our next war.

"In the ordinary course, the situation should have become one for the attention of our minister to Costilloro. But Hillgarth, the incumbent, is a child of diplomacy. Worse, he's been fearfully taken into camp by Monteleone. They've become playmates, organized a sort of mutual-admiration society.

"So Maitland went down to follow the leads dug up by Ann Laird, pick up what documentary evidence came to hand, and presently try a line of moral suasion on *el presidente*.

"Six weeks ago, that was; in late May. Monteleone, and his cabinet and the diplomatic corps were just then fleeing from the heat of Sandovar. The government was in course of transfer to the summer capital in the mountains—Delrondo, isn't it?

"Well, Maitland journeyed up to Delrondo after having a talk with Miss Laird in Puerto Cabezo. Then he came down again, spent a couple of days in more or less mysterious activities in and about the port, and presently announced his second departure. He was bound south, he said.

"Miss Laird saw no more of him. In course of time she came to the conclusion he had wound up his business and found a way out of Costilloro without revisiting Puerto Cabezo."

Leguerre, who from all appearance might have been woolgathering, withdrew his gaze from the blank wall facing the window, stifled a yawn, and offered a suggestion:

"Easy enough, if he went south from Cabezo. There's no shipping out of Sandovar—harbor's been sealed by a shifting of the bar these last eight or ten years—but the railroad runs on to Buena Regina, in the Locandan Republic. The Consolidated Tropical fleet makes a couple of calls there a week, northbound. But Maitland——"

"Maitland certainly got no northbound boat of any fleet. Chances are, he never got out of Costilloro. Dead or alive, he's probably still down there."

"And the plutocrats of his department'd like to have the Lost Division find him and retrieve him? My word, chief, that's a concession! Anything else?"

"They want the job cleaned up—if Maitland either didn't finish it or can't be dug out. That's what I mean to imply when I say it's a case of lending you. You're to have the minister-without-portfolio berth—if you care for it. Take on where Maitland left off. Do what further investigating is necessary, and then ride onto Monteleone with a tall hat and a high horse."

Leguerre had opened his cigarette case again—now with a jubilant sort of snap.

"I say!" he exclaimed. "An entrancing vista, judge! Do you know, I've

always thought I'd show a flair for statecraft—the top-hat kind—if ever I had a real chance!"

Gingerly sliding his legs off to the floor, Gunther planted his elbows on the desk-pull and brought his fingertips firmly together. Over the thin steeple they made he looked thoughtfully at young Mr. Nugent Leguerre—thoughtfully, and a little unhappily, as if he discovered somehow an element of the deplorable in this highly unusual, if fugitive, enthusiasm.

"I was afraid it would appeal to you —*that* part of it," he said slowly. "But you must understand, Leguerre, I'm most certainly not pressing you to go. Rather—rather the—ah—contrary. In two or three weeks, I may say, there'll be an errand coming the division's way that will take some one to northern Europe. You, for instance, would surely be able to carry it off in a splendid manner. I'd enjoy a month among the fjords myself. As for Costilloro, it'll be devilish hot down in that part of the world, and——"

Leguerre sighed and touched his cheek with a monogrammed handkerchief of diaphanous linen.

"I know," he murmured. "I hate to think of the parboiling."

Judge Gunther lowered his eyes to glare balefully at the smoldering cheroot.

"Now, there's another thing I haven't mentioned. Maitland, you know, was a bit of a genius in the line of photography. I fancy that would have been the deciding factor in choosing him for the Costilloro assignment; and I dare say that a man familiar with camera work would be the best sort to follow him. Gad! but I'm glad that occurred to me. On Wednesday, Beatty is due in Washington—he's starting from the Pacific coast this evening."

Leguerre's eyesbrows went up.

"What cameras have to do with this job in Costilloro is beyond me at the moment," he said, "but you force me to remark, chief, that I've always taken an excellent picture." He paused to consider the assertion, a faint flush stealing into his cheeks. "That is, I really do protograph well—er—deuce take it, I mean to say, I *can* handle a camera with the next man! Word of honor!"

Gunther's head was wagging.

"No, Leguerre; I fear you couldn't measure up—ah—photographically, at any rate. As I understand, there's a possibility that a number of documents will figure. The fellow in Monteleone's government who has given his confidence to Miss Laird would be signing his death warrant if he let them out of his possession—and without well-authenticated facsimiles, our position won't be——"

"Please allow me a word!" begged Leguerre. "One part of the job's likely to be photographing 'em on the fly, what? Why should that have me up a tree? Do you remember, judge, a group photo I sent you from Tripoli last year? Not bad, now, was it And I took it myself with a mite of a camera I'd picked up in France. Wonderful lens it has, yet the whole business can be hidden in the palm of the hand. It's over in my rooms at this moment. So then!"

"Then," said Gunther, with a dawning of defeat in his gray eyes that belied the stubborn set of his jaw, "there's the object lesson presented by Maitland. That must be considered. If he has bungled and been caught up, as is most likely the case, it makes the hazard so much the greater for you. No, my boy, I'll not in any circumstance accept your snap decision now. Take at least the night to think it over. In the morning, if you tell me you've definitely made up your mind to go, I'll send you along to Raymond for complete instructions—and say good-by to you."

A lazy smoke wreath drawn from the cigarette and slowly exhaled was just

then merging into the darker blue of a cloud from the cheroot. Leguerre, apparently, found more interest in their soft intertwining than in the later words of his chief.

"Mind's absolutely made up this minute," said he, painstakingly avoiding the reproachful gaze fixed upon him. "Has been, I don't mind saying, from your first mention of little Ann Laird. Jove! but it's going to be jolly seeing her again—after all these centuries!"

To his deepest discomfiture, though, Leguerre discovered when on the eighth day following he dropped off a neat, white steamer at Puerto Cabezo and into the American consulate back of the wharf, the pleasure of his new meeting with Miss Ann Laird was entirely his own. He had presented himself to her wearing the most immaculate of tropicals, a sun helmet freshly pipe-clayed against the auspicious occasion and a very happy smile, but the *tout ensemble* failed signally to achieve the hoped-for effect.

Miss Laird, capably occupied in the examination and stamping of manifests in the outer office, appeared rather disturbed than delighted by the interruption. Her hand was limp and lifeless in Leguerre's clasp—and chilly even to the touch.

He dropped the hand; stood off from her and stared. The quality of her expression—could there be a trace of consternation in it?—was baffling to him.

"Oh, I say!" he protested. "You're—different! Have you forgotten Paris? And then, the—the last time? Those weeks out of Vancouver?"

It seemed that Miss Laird hadn't. She hesitated a little before replying, and then in the briefest form possible and the coolest voice imaginable made denial.

"No."

She really was, Leguerre thought, vainly searching her level brown eyes for some answer to the enigma of her reception, the most amazing as well as one of the most charming of her species.

"You're not," he said, rather flatly stating the indisputable and still incomprehensible fact, "not the least bit pleased to see me."

Miss Laird pressed a rubber stamp firmly against the ink pad, thumped down the stamp upon a manifest and with a pen superscribed an official signature.

"I'm not," she said evenly, when this operation had been completed. "Not at all."

The doubtful advantage of probing her eyes was now lost to Leguerre, for she had not lifted them again from the work on her desk. He drew up a chair, dropped disconsolately into it, and fished for his cigarette case.

"You know why I'm here?" he asked after a moment.

"I have a certain amount of imagination, and have been known to make use of it," said Miss Laird.

Under inspection that remark somehow took shape as a floating straw. Leguerre eagerly reached out for it.

"Then you didn't know I'd be looking in on you?"

Miss Laird disposed with stamp and pen of another manifest.

"I knew somebody was coming down. But I didn't consider the possibility it would be—any one from another service."

Leguerre thought he had a glimmer then; and in the faint light of it he resurveyed and condoned her failure to play up adequately to the long-lost-brother rôle in which, if truth be told, he had rather fancied himself in shipboard anticipation. In the girl, pride of service was innate, too. As he had his pride, so she had her own—a pride surpassing all personal considerations. And so what he had read for consternation, must really have been chagrin. Immediately his rising constraint succumbed to understanding.

"Sorry to disappoint you," he humbly assured her. "The thing was, of course, that your own people were far scattered and sewed up, and I happened to be idling in the stall. So, since I'd done a chore or two down this way, they resolved for better or worse to let me try my hand. It's no matter of superseding. Great Scott, no! Just—expediency. And, naturally, I'm depending no end on your advice."

Miss Laird raised her eyes and looked at him with characteristic directness.

"I'm afraid," she said in a voice unaccountably changed, "that you won't take it. The first piece of advice that occurs to me, I mean."

It occurred to Leguerre, on brief reflection, that his recently developed theory might stand revising.

"I can't think of any reason why you should say that," he said slowly. "Suppose you try me. Perhaps if I heard the advice——"

Again he found her eyes hard to read. They had softened; and their expression, if it hadn't been quite too preposterous a thought to harbor, might have been one of pleading.

"The *Rosita* will be taking on cargo for the next three or four hours," she said. "And, frankly, Nugent, I'd find a great deal more joy in your visit if—if I knew you were sailing out of Costilloro aboard her."

Leguerre regarded her with blank astonishment.

"What-o!" he exclaimed. "Is *that* your advice? You'd have me do an about-face directly I've got solid earth under me? Sail down in the *Rosita,* and sail away same voyage—like a round-tripper touch-and-go tourist? My word, Ann! And just what sort of a report would you suggest I make to your honorable secretary?"

The girl had no direct answer for the question. She faced Leguerre with her small hands clenched on the desk before her.

"He shouldn't have sent you!" she cried. "Never—*you!*"

Leguerre, blinking, entered an immediate but mild protest:

"Don't see why. It's not my first experience at straddling the equator, you know. I know the people, speak their language, have a fair insight already into this particular situation, and certainly won't stop short of——"

"There!" Her voice had sharpened. "That's just it! It's what you won't stop short of that—that terrifies me! Don't think I've ever been misled by the play acting that's second nature to you, by the blasé front you turn to the world. I know what's behind it, *underneath!* I know the desperate chances you've taken—in Quixatello, in Morovnia—oh, I could name a score of places, for my ears have always been open when I've heard your name! But here in Costilloro, now——"

The flush was creeping back under Leguerre's tan. Scrutinizing his finger nails with a severity quite unwarranted, he painfully cleared his throat.

"What awfully silly slush!" he groaned. "Who's been stuffing you, Ann? Gad! I'd like to thrash it out with him, and that's a fact. If a man can't go decently about the work he's paid and pledged to do—can't go energetically about it when needful without being painted behind his back as a swashbuckling bravo——"

He looked up to see that her eyes had left him. She was looking past him, and the curious intensity of her gaze caused him to break off.

"Now what?" he demanded. "If it wasn't entirely too early in the day for ghosts to be walking, I'd say——"

"Don't turn!" she cautioned quickly. "Not for a minute. Get up, and walk down the room, and then back. Take a good look, as you're coming up, at the man standing over the way—under the warehouse shed."

Leguerre nodded. He drew again at

his cigarette, yawned, stretched, languidly arose and followed directions.

Thrice he paced the length of the office before resuming his seat.

"Ducked like a flash, what?" he queried. "But I had a fair shot at him before he got under cover. Squinty little chap with a waxed mustache, and an oversize, floppy Panama and a brown-paper cigarette. I fancy I'll know him again. What about him?"

"A—a bad omen," said Miss Laird. "It gave me a shudder to see him over there."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know."

"Then?"

"He's the same man who—who watched George Maitland."

Leguerre's chin went up.

"That's interesting. I *will* remember him. One of these days I'll probably find profit in a talk with him. You say he was watching Maitland? Well, that brings us around to my job in hand. When was the watching done? Where?" The questions were shot forth quickly.

Miss Laird flipped down the cover of the ink pad and pushed the pile of manifests aside.

"It was the second time—and the last time—I saw George Maitland," she said. "Mr. Maitland was sitting beside me, just as you are, with his back to the window. I chanced to glance over his shoulder, and saw the man in the Panama. He was dressed exactly as he is to-day, and was standing in exactly the same place. He was staring across the road—staring, I thought, in through our window.

"I must have stared back pretty hard, too. At any rate, Mr. Maitland stopped talking and swung around. He was smiling when he turned back to me, as if it were all a good joke.

" 'Oh, that's a little friend of mine who keeps bobbing up here and there,' he told me. 'He's probably some sort of local sleuth, innocently following his nose. Don't pay any attention to him, Miss Laird. *I* never do!'

"And that was all there was to it. The man retreated out of sight, evidently suspecting he'd been observed. I saw no more of him. But—I saw no more of George Maitland, either, after that day!"

Leguerre's eyes fastened dubiously on the door of the private office at the rear.

"We've so much to talk over!" he murmured. "I'm afraid we're likely to be interrupted here."

Miss Laird shook her head.

"No," she said; "we're quite alone. Mr. Holland, the consul, is convalescing from a bad siege of fever. I've been acting for him since the middle of the month."

Leguerre grinned.

"Sorry for Holland—but none the less grateful to him. It would have been a long afternoon if I'd had to wait for you, Ann. Fact is, I don't believe Puerto Cabezo has one single other attraction to offer."

But he could not cajole away her now-quite-patent distress.

"If you'd only go with the *Rosita!*" she urged, in hopeless desperation.

"I'd do anything else in the world for you, Ann," Leguerre avowed. "Really would, you know. It's not a fancy speech, my word. But, coming down to it again, I do think you attach too much importance entirely to the little man with the big curiosity and the squint. Very likely Maitland was right about him. However, I didn't expect for a minute that I could wander at will through Costilloro without having the eye of authority on me now and again. Now in regard to Maitland: he came to the consulate twice?"

Miss Laird sighed deeply, immediately after which a measure of her earlier cool competence returned to her eyes.

"Twice. The first time he stayed only

a few minutes. Mr. Holland was here, so we arranged to meet in the evening. I gave him what information I had then, and he went on up to Delrondo in the morning."

"You know what his plans were?"

"In a general way. Whether he intended to pay a visit to the presidential palace, I'm not sure. But he was going to look up Francisco Bernetto and Andreas Martel. They——"

"I know," Leguerre cut in. "I've seen your reports. Bernetto is the friendly gentleman who has Monteleone's secret correspondence in his charge, and Martel is his cousin and secretary. I further gathered that Bernetto is willing to exhibit the overseas letters, but doesn't dare let them pass from his possession. Seems simple as A B C to me, for they could be photographed in a jiffy. Didn't Maitland manage it?"

"He didn't find Señor Bernetto in Delrondo. After he had waited a couple of days, Martel turned up. Bernetto, he said, would be at least another week in Sandovar before transferring his department."

"Yet Maitland came back to Puerto Cabezo?"

"He told me had heard of several people here who might have interesting information. Who they were, or what the information might be, he didn't say. But he had been in Puerto Cabezo for days before he visited the consulate, I knew."

Leguerre thrust his hands deep in his pockets.

"Poor Maitland!" he said. "He always was one to bury a secret way, way down. So he gave you no more information? He didn't take you more fully into his confidence?"

"I still see no reason why he should have," commented Miss Laird calmly. "There was no question of—seniority. The assignment was his."

"He didn't even tell you where he was heading for when he pushed out of Cabezo the second time?"

"Only that he was going south along the coast."

"Which meant, in all probability, to Sandovar?"

"It might have meant that. Or he might have passed through and gone directly into Locanda. All I've been able to learn is that when he left Cabezo he bought transportation to Buena Regina. But that's no proof he didn't plan to stop off on the way."

"Course it isn't. Gad! If ever I'd been to all the places I've bought tickets for—— I say, am I allowed a guess so early in the game? Really, it was my guess before I left Washington. Well, then, it's that Maitland stopped in Sandovar—and stayed there!"

Miss Laird betrayed no symptom of surprise.

"Isn't it the obvious guess?" she questioned, patting a vagrant brown lock into place. "But guessing and proving are two different things. And so, for that matter, are proving and—helping George Maitland. Unfortunately, I haven't been able to do either."

She spoke now without spirit, almost with bitterness.

"How could you—with your hands tied?" demanded Leguerre. "Whatever Maitland's got himself into, it's his own fault. If luck's with me, I'm going to take the liberty of telling him so. He'd have fared a lot better if he'd taken you in on his plans—as I'm certainly going to do on mine. For we're in the same service now, you and I, Ann Laird—until this blessed job is done with!"

They were at tea on a shady veranda when a shrill succession of whistle blasts told of the imminent departure of the neat, white *Rosita;* but Miss Laird, though she caught her breath, was by then resigned.

"You'll be careful?" she insisted.

And Leguerre, who had risen and was pressing her hand a second time, and lingeringly, said: "My word for it!"

At that moment, in the light of Miss Laird's shrew observations on the Costilloran scene, and with her notes to Bernetto and Martel in his pocket, it did seem he'd have fairly smooth sailing ahead.

He was rather cast down, indeed, by the tameness of the prospect; and even his discovery of a small, squinting fellow passenger aboard the train on which he started up toward Delrondo that same evening failed to buoy him. The squinting man didn't even represent a complication. Time and again in the past he had discovered means, when he wished, of ridding himself of far less obvious shadows.

His program was short and simple—a program of direct action. He'd dodge Mr. "Squint" presently at the cost of an extra cab, make contact with Bernetto, photograph those very compromising letters, and in the course of the eventual showdown with *el presidente* get the truth about Maitland. Then, of course, if the worst hadn't already come to pass, he'd whip Maitland out of his hole.

But Delrondo held only disappointment. President Monteleone, he learned on his arrival, was out of the city—had gone, he was told, on some sort of inspection tour along the Costilloran west coast. Neither was Bernetto in the summer capital, nor his cousin, Martel. The best information he could get concerning them in guarded inquiries at the Foreign Club, where a letter written by Miss Laird had won him standing as the agent of a great American machinery house, was that the two had not yet come up from Sandovar.

Down to Sandovar, after days of futile waiting, went Leguerre, dropping off to Ann Laird as he started an innocently worded telegram which apprised her of the stalemate in Delrondo and his plan to visit the city on the lower Caribbean coast.

From Sandovar, soon after his arrival, he contrived again to get word to Miss Laird; but he had nothing of moment to report to her then. He hadn't located Bernetto, whose home he had found closed. However, he was free of the attentions of the squinting gentleman for the time being, and had hope of making and developing the acquaintance of one whom Bernetto numbered among his best friends.

This person was a Señor Coralio Estrada, and to Leguerre he was only a name when the second message went to Puerto Cabezo. But with the passing of another day he had been encountered, and with the exhibition of Miss Laird's note to Bernetto his confidence had been almost instantly won.

"Ah, señor!" he whispered across the remote table which Leguerre had chosen for their conference. "This letter you will never deliver. Bernetto is dead!"

That was, from the tone of Señor Estrada, a very private piece of information, and it was only under pressure that he amplified it. Bernetto was dead, he explained, because he had in some manner offended *El Presidente* Monteleone. He had, in short, been stood against a wall and shot. It was now weeks since, but there as yet had been no public announcement of Bernetto's trial and execution.

Leguerre found Estrada still less willing to discuss the fate of Andreas Martel. In reply to the first gentle question, he professed a profound ignorance; would not be certain that Martel was even an acquaintance. But after a couple of long evenings brightened by Leguerre's sprightly observations on the life of the rich expatriate Latin-Americans in Europe, Señor Estrada let down his last guard.

Martel, he suddenly confessed, was in reality also his good friend, and Martel

was alive. Nor did he stop at confession. After midnight had struck he took Leguerre off his Swampscott-built speed dory to a lonely island and a fisherman's hovel where Bernetto's kinsman had been in hiding for weeks past, awaiting a favorable opportunity to smuggle himself out of unhealthful Costilloro.

Meeting Martel, Leguerre met another disappointment. The letters in which *El Señor Americano* was interested, Martel said, had been reclaimed from Bernetto at the time of his arrest and now must be in President Monteleone's possession and so out of reach.

In regard to Maitland, Martel knew little. He had met that amiable American in Delrondo, had advised him to confer with several Liberals in Puerto Cabezo before visiting Bernetto in Sandovar, and had not seen or heard of him since.

The cousin of the firing squad's victim was desolated that he could not tell more; and to witness both his sorrow and good will he volunteered that before taking flight he had thought to remove from Bernetto's files certain vouchers, showing a number of singular withdrawals of golden specie from the national treasury of Costilloro.

More than merely exhibiting these vouchers, Martel was pleased to confide them to the custody of Señor Laguerre. It was his hope they might be useful in unseating the present Costilloran government and making it possible for true patriots to live publicly in the style which their attainments and fortune commanded, rather than in lean-tos haunted by the spirits of many long-dead fishes.

To Leguerre, the documents thus pressed upon him were less than exciting. The pilfering they indicated, although conducted upon a grand scale, lacked the element of surprise. Treasury looting, as he had long since discovered, was a common pastime of the highly placed through virtually the whole of the quinine and rum belts.

However, he took the vouchers with him, and, when he eventually arrived in his chamber overlooking the moon-drenched patio of the Hotel Republica in Sandovar, gave them further study. Backed by a hard enough eye, he thought, they might yet give him a sufficient leverage to pry Monteleone out of his palace; and he decided to start back to Puerto Cabezo on the morning train and get Ann Laird's opinion.

Retiring, he had both the papers and his pistol under his pillow. It was after three then, and he had had a long day of it. He dropped off at once into a sleep so deep that, waked out of it betimes, he had no thought for vouchers or automatic before it was too late to dispose of the one or avail himself of the other.

His lights had been switched on, and the room was filled with men wearing the sky-blue uniform of the military establishment of the Costilloran Republic. They were the uniforms of officers, yet command of the intruders seem to lie with a civilian.

This was a small man affecting a waxed mustache and a Panama hat that could well have stood a little wadding under the sweatband.

He held a pistol very close to Leguerre's head, and the black eyes which lined along the barrel had a most unpleasant squint.

It was in a white-walled cell high up in Castle Todos, the great Costilloran barracks and military prison which for two centuries and more had glowered across the Bay of Sandovar, that Leguerre finished his night.

Arrested while in possession of stolen State papers of the republic, it was a highly dubious to-morrow that was coming up. No great amount of reflection was required to generate most active misgivings; but he was, after all, ex-

tremely tired, and when he had ascertained by painstaking inspection that he would have the cell pallet comparatively to himself, he lay down upon it and finished out his sleep.

It was mid-forenoon when he awoke, and within an hour he made discovery that he was not alone in his box. Called forth, marched through many corridors and down many stairways, and finally into a room where a row of sky-blue officers sat in solemn conclave behind a long table, he recognized two others present in mufti. Sadder still he became in realization of the further degree by which he had underestimated the abilities of the person with the squint. They'd made a clean sweep of it: Estrada and Martel were in the game bag, too.

In the ensuing half hour Leguerre was stirred to a grudging admiration of the Costilloran speed in dispensing military justice. It had taken no more time than that to arrive at a verdict and deliver sentence. Only one witness was heard. Given the floor without question or quibble, he plunged into a dramatic recital of the panorama of conspiracy which during this last amazing week had unfolded under his all-seeing if slightly mismated eyes. The vouchers seized from Leguerre was his sole evidence.

It was permitted, it seemed, that the witness serve in the capacity of prosecutor and jury as well. When he had closed his peroration with a pointing finger and a cry of "There sit the guilty!" there was not even fleeting discussion of evidence or precedent among the court-martial judges.

"Without doubt, guilty!" solemnly acquiesced the fat colonel who sat at the middle of the table. "The sentence, unhappily, is mandatory under Costilloran law. It is, of course, death!"

Then he accepted the second light from a neighbor's match, as prescribed by the Latin etiquette of the *cigarillo* and crisply addressed the prison officer lolling in the doorway:

"It is finished! *Teniente,* withdraw the condemned!"

As they were herded to the door, Leguerre found opportunity to exchange a whisper of commiseration with Estrada and Martel, but over the threshold their ways parted. The two Costillorans, apparently, had been accommodated lower down in the fortress. Clustered about by their guards, they descended stairs that probe precipitously off the corridor on which the room of the court-martial opened.

It was the young lieutenant himself who marched Leguerre to his eyrie, and he paused to curl his mustache over a cold smile when the steel gate had been closed and locked.

"Perhaps I can cheer you, señor," he said politely. "Where you are going, I can at least inform you, there will be waiting one who is, I think, a friend. A Señor Maitland, if I have correct the unusual name. He died in the courtyard below your window with the illustrious Bernetto. Ah, a day!"

Leguerre, observing the officer was disposed to linger, drew out the thin, golden case which, with his wallet and other effects of the person had fortuitously been spared to him.

"May I ask a question?" he wanted to know. "How long is it, usually, before——"

The lieutenant laughed.

"Do not tell me, señor, that you fear to die!"

Leguerre shrugged.

"What is death? But you will see, *teniente,* that I have left only six cigarettes. I should like to know how sparing I must be of them, that I may have one remaining for—the last."

The Costilloran's demeanor underwent a swift change. He touched the visor of his kepi.

"You have my heart, señor!" said he. "It must be that you are, too, a

soldier. So I tell you freely that if you smoke five of your cigarettes to-day, you will not regret the smoking—to-morrow. Yours, as I perceive, are Egyptians. But if the cigarettes of my country are also to your taste——"

"Thanks, no, *teniente,*" said Leguerre, bowing. "I find them rather strong."

The officer returned the bow, began a speech, thought better of it, saluted again and strode away. But within an hour he had returned, and now the world suddenly went giddy. For he brought with him the last person whom Leguerre had expected—or dared hope—to see in Sandovar. He rubbed his eyes.

"Ann!" he cried. "How the deuce are——"

Miss Laird, her face as white as the dress she wore, turned an appealing glance toward the Costilloran.

"May we talk—alone?" she asked in Spanish.

The lieutenant hesitated.

"It is not permitted," he said. He looked Leguerre full in the eye. "But," he added, "if the señor will trust a soldier's honor, it may be significant to him that I unfortunately have no English—understand not five words."

One swift glance at the immobile face satisfied Miss Laird.

"By a lucky chance," she said hurriedly, "the news was in Puerto Cabezo when I arose this morning. How lucky that chance was, I can't tell yet, for I haven't been able to get in touch with *el presidente.* He is the only man in Costilloro who can save you, for Minister Hillgarth flatly refuses to act."

"You've heard of the court-martial?" Leguerre asked. "Jove! This Costilloran justice runs faster than the legendary Jersey article, at home."

Miss Laird's pallor had increased by several shades.

"I know. The comandante told me it's—it's to-morrow morning. It must be the truth, else he'd scarcely have let me come to you. He knows that before the slow wheels in Washington can be driven to turn, there'll—be no good in the turning."

Leguerre smiled down her rising panic.

"Well, I'm at least a thousand per cent better off for having you on the job, Ann!" he earnestly assured her. "Oh, absolutely! I know now there's a chance. Makes a game of it, instead of a slaughter. I'll be no end interested in seeing how you make out. If you don't—well, as I said in Maitland's case, it'll be nobody's fault but my own. And as for Maitland, my dear—I've come upon a most unhappy solution to *his* little mystery. There's a courtyard down below, you see." He nodded toward the barred window. "A courtyard—and a wall!"

Miss Laird covered her eyes with her hands. But the eyes were steady still when the hands came down. They fastened on the chain looped across the front of Leguerre's light coat, leading from a buttonhole to the breast pocket.

"The comandante said I might have only five minutes," she said tentatively.

Leguerre grinned.

"Sorry," he said, "but this is about the most impractical watch I've ever carried. Can't tell a blessed thing by it."

The lieutenant, though, had the time—and was checking it.

"Pardon!" he interjected. "I must advise the señorita that her visit is at end."

She had time only for a final whisper:

"I'll come back this evening—if they'll let me. And then, pray Heaven, I may have better news for you."

"You're good enough news by yourself, Ann!" Leguerre sang out cheerfully after her; and he lighted the second cigarette of his six while he listened to her footsteps fading on the stone of the corridor.

What a day! he reflected. The night arrest, the trial and death sentence, the

answer to Maitland's vanishing, Ann Laird's surprise visit—what else could possibly be forthcoming?

And then presently came the *teniente* once more to answer that.

"You are to be honored, señor!" he whispered through the grating. "Our president comes in person to confer with you. Listen! It is his step!"

Leguerre didn't have to strain his ears, for the approaching steps were heavy ones. He had only time to ask himself by what miracle a man could be on two coasts of a country at the one time—hadn't even begun to wonder what business had brought the elusive Monteleone to him—when a bulkier shape replaced the lieutenant's figure at the grating.

It was a veritable mountain of a man who now stood on his inhospitable threshold—a man with a queer beak of a nose, and penetrating eyes, and a face deeply pockmarked where beard did not grow over it. He stood for a moment like a stage figure picked out by a spotlight, bathed in the brilliant shaft which the nooning sun shot down from the cell window within the grating.

"You have ill repaid Costilloro's hospitality, señor!"

At last he had spoken, and in the harsh voice which might have been expected to issue from so tight-lipped and cruel a mouth.

Leguerre smiled and nodded and sacrificed another cigarette to the occasion.

"Please to grant, excellency," he remarked diffidently, "that it is a matter of opinion. There may be some who would concede that my effort was to serve Costilloro's best interests. When two millions of gold pesos are diverted to private uses from——"

"Enough!" cried the big man. "You know whom you address?"

"I was delighted to learn," said Leguerre. "The American acting consul from Puerto Cortez is in Sandovar, and most anxious to go over certain details of my case with you."

An explosive "Bah!" burst its way through the thin, compressed lips of *el presidente*.

"I have heard," he said. "A—woman. But to her I am not available. She has been informed that I am in a far section of the country, and this she believes."

"Perhaps," suggested Leguerre helpfully, "she only pretends to believe."

The mountainous Monteleone laughed.

"I know she has talked with you," he said, and snapped his big fingers with the effect of a pistol crack. "Of certainty I know. Did I not in person empower my comandante to admit her to the prison? That was diplomacy, señor—and diplomacy is my career."

"But excellency has," murmured Leguerre, "he has—if I may resort to the English idiom—some lovely side lines."

The resort to English had carried beyond Monteleone's comprehension. He looked puzzled, lifted a dimissing shoulder, and went on:

"Diplomacy, señor! And, on request, the woman may come to you again. Costilloro, just at this time, is not ready to sacrifice the friendship of the insolent Colossus of the North. So your acting consul shall have the fullest privileges—all but that of appealing to Costilloro's president for clemency before you have pair your debt."

Leguerre had been regarding Monteleone through half-closed eyes.

"Surely," he said, "excellency has not honored me merely to tell me this?"

El presidente laughed once more.

"You have a shrewdness, señor. You have a sense of the executive dignity and the value of the executive time."

Leguerre lifted a languid hand, and meditatively plucked at his ear.

"Time!" he echoed. "It means little to me, even at this interesting crisis. Is it not travesty that with even my minutes numbered, my timepiece should be

—as it is?" He looked from Monteleone to the prison officer standing at stiff attention beside him. *"Teniente,* will you oblige me with the hour?"

He had tugged at the thin chain, and his watch was in his hand.

"Half after eleven?" he repeated. "Ah, thanks. I shall remember you in heaven!"

Monteleone smiled under his beard as he watched the by-play.

"Observe, señor, our courtesy to our guests," he said, with a rumbling chuckle. "We deny them nothing, in Costilloro. Not even life, when they have abused our kindness. And this I mean, señor. I speak in all frankness, for I come directly to the purpose of my visit."

"I am ready to hear," said Leguerre. And he added in apology: "Not that I haven't enjoyed the small talk, you know!"

Again the English idiom, although now literally translated, was lost on *el presidente.*

"On certain conditions," Monteleone continued, "you may yet save yourself from the penalty you merit."

"Let me hear the conditions," said Leguerre.

"You are, señor, an agent of the North American States. That, of course, we know."

"May I reserve comment?"

"Of certainty. Comment is not necessary. Now, you will perhaps be possessed of certain information pertaining to Costilloro—information which, let us say, has come to your government from other agents."

"If I were?"

"Then, señor, depending only on the extent of your willingness to coöperate with Costilloro, your fate is in your own hands. You will remain in confinement, of course, until the authenticity of what you may impart in relation to your government's knowledge and plans has been established. But in the end there will lie before you not only life, but freedom. And you, señor, are young."

Leguerre nodded.

"But, excellency," he demurred, "I am not young in experience. Assuming that I can repurchase my life at a price most profitable to Costilloro—which is to say, yourself—what guarantee have I that you will hold to your bargain?"

Monteleone placed one of his huge hands on his heart.

"My word of honor, señor."

Leguerre rubbed his chin.

"If excellency," he suggested deprecatingly, "could think of something more —tangible?"

El presidente glared.

"You speak boldly, señor! Remember that my favor is the thread which holds up the sword above you. But—but, yes. There could be other guarantees. What would you demand?"

Leguerre still rubbed his chin.

"It's rather a problem to say, offhand. Perhaps you'd better give me the night to think it over. In the meantime—you really mean that the American acting consul may see me if she comes here again?"

Louder than before laughed Monteleone.

"Why not? Ah, you will tell her you have seen me? But *she* has not, and she will not. And the wild speech of a man condemned, perhaps already unbalanced by the weight of his misfortune—what counts that? No, señor. You may be sure that the way of the woman consul will not be barred. She may flood the cables, if she will, with messages to Washington. We shall aid her in every manner, for that is the way of diplomacy. But your minister, I have reason to believe, will not interfere with execution of a sentence duly passed under Costilloran law. And without his aid—or the exercise of your own good judgment—you die with the coming of the dawn!"

"But you know," Leguerre pointed

out in last resort, "there'll be a tremendous row."

Monteleone thumped a fist against the grating.

"*That* for your government's investigation!" he grunted. "How can it affect me—Costilloro's president? I, who have known nothing of your connection or your predicament? I, who can prove I knew nothing? If subordinates, officers of my army, have been over-hasty, they shall have what punishment our great friendly sister republic demands—and shall in a private manner be reimbursed. And so——"

Leguerre shuddered even as he smiled.

"You do think things out, excellency!" he granted. "You have the true flair of the artist in diplomacy. But—but you'll *surely* come to see me in the morning?"

Costilloro's giant president was, in several demonstrable respects, at least, a gentleman of his word.

His promise in regard to the acting consul's freedom of access to the political prisoner, Leguerre, held excellently good.

Not only once, but twice following *el presidente's* farewell to Leguerre, the courteous comandante allowed Miss Laird to again enter the fortress and cheerfully granted to her the consular privilege.

Miss Laird paid the first of these two later visits within the same hour of the interesting interview between Leguerre and Monteleone. The second was paid next morning at a less conventional time—just, in fact, as dawn was pinking the seaward horizon.

Drums were then beginning to thump and commands to ring in the courtyard of the prison; but even with these ominous sounds of preparation in her ears, and despite her failure to reach President Monteleone, the petticoat consul bore up well.

With the utmost of courage and composure, she said good-by to Leguerre and straightway boarded the early morning train for Puerto Cortez.

By curious coincidence, it was just as the train got under way that *el presidente* fulfilled another promise. Once more he presented himself to Leguerre; and now, while the *teniente* stood in the corridor with pistol drawn, he accorded the prisoner the further honor of entering his cell.

"It is so," he explained, "we may converse with privacy."

"A wise precaution," agreed Leguerre.

Monteleone, who wore a coat much like Gunther's, albeit infinitely fuller, parted its skirts as he made himself comfortable on the pallet.

"You have something to tell me, perhaps, señor?" he suggested.

Briefly and with no hesitation whatsoever, Leguerre replied:

"Much!"

Monteleone appeared to find his promptness disconcerting. It might have been to give himself time for thought that he applied himself without further question to the manufacture of a brown-paper cigarette.

In Leguerre's golden case only one cigarette remained. Prodigally, he lighted it.

"But, excellency," he added in a voice faintly tinged with regret, "I fear the information I have for you is not of a sort to please."

El presidente looked up quickly, and frowned as he moistened the edge of the brown paper.

"What is this?" he demanded. "Do you not hear?"

Below in the courtyard, the drums were beating in faster tempo.

Leguerre walked to his window and came back.

"It means nothing to me," he said quietly. "And it is for your own good that I warn you it had best mean nothing to Estrada, or poor Martel!"

Monteleone stared over the still unlighted cigarette.

"Madness has come to you in the night!" he cried.

"Not madness," said Leguerre, "but reprieve."

"Reprieve! Ah, I deplore that reason has deserted you, señor! Now it would be lunacy for me to give further time to you."

Leguerre sank his hands in the pockets of his no longer fresh jacket.

"At least *I* am satisfied to call it a reprieve," said he evenly. "It is proof that excellency knows, if not of my connection, at least of my—was excellency's own word 'predicament?' If President Monteleone will give me the favor of a glance——"

Leguerre's right hand had come from his pocket, and under *el presidente's* startled eyes he was holding what appeared to be a photograph of a bearded, frock-coated prisoner. Bars were in the foreground, but the face behind them was not to be mistaken. Señor Monteleone was looking at a picture of himself.

"What is this?" he wheezed.

"Precisely," averred Leguerre, "what it appears to be. A photograph of excellency as he stood in conversation with me in the broad, invading sunlight of yesterday. I have no doubt that it will prove a point. No other man living, if excellency will pardon, has a countenance matching that of President Monteleone of Costilloro. And *el presidente,* supposedly traveling along the west coast of his country, is seen here in Castle Todos Prison!"

The hand into which *el presidente* had taken the picture was tremulous. He adjusted a pair of square-lensed spectacles, the better to study it.

"This photograph was made in the late forenoon of yesterday," pursued Leguerre. "It was I who made it. I had naturally no means of developing and enlarging my negative—but, as excellency will observe, I found a way. It was kind, I will confess, that excellency permitted to Miss Ann Laird of Puerto Cabezo the consular privilege.

"Further I shall inform you that not one but many prints of this photograph have been made. By as many different channels, no less than twenty are now on their way to Washington. It would be absurd to think that all could be caught back.

"And may I point out, excellency, that my government certainly will demand an eye for an eye—demand it of you personally—when it is proved that you willingly allowed an agent of the United States to die before Costilloran rifles?"

Perspiration had started from *el presidente's* forehead, and a vapor from it clouded his spectacles. But when the vapor had cleared his eyes were sparkling behind them.

"Clever, señor!" he exclaimed. "But in your cleverness you have overreached yourself—and for that, too, must you die!"

"Como?" queried Leguerre. "Please tell me why."

Triumph lighted Monteleone's heavy face.

"This, señor," he roared, "is a photograph of myself. That I will admit. Also I will admit that the bars suggest the photograph was taken in a prison. By what magic you have accomplished this thing I cannot imagine. But where is the proof that I was looking at *you?* Do you not perceive, señor, that your magic fell short—that it did not enable you to take at the same time a photograph of yourself? This picture, by itself, proves nothing."

Leguerre's hand dropped into his pocket again and brought out a duplicate of the picture over which Monteleone was savagely grinning.

"Another," he said. "Oh, there are lots of them in circulation, as I've told you! And in reference to excellency's

last well-chosen argument, may I not direct his attention to a certain significant item in the foreground of the composition?"

He pointed.

"That is not a blotch, excellency, but a finger. The finger is so turned that the tiny, all-betraying lines at the tip of it have photographed wonderfully. And that finger, as consultation of certain records in Washington will show, could have been on the hand of no man under the stars except my humble self—Nugent Legurere!"

Tea again on a shaded porch in Puerto Cabezo—tea served a fortnight to the day after Leguerre had first been welcomed to the hospital veranda.

And again young Mr. Leguerre was an honored guest. Now he was saying, as he placed in the hand of Miss Laird a very solid-looking watch attached to a most conspicuously inadequate chain:

"I want you to have it, Ann! Just as something to remember—to remember the—ah—incident by. Wonderful sell, now, isn't it? One can't beat the French, after all. Who the deuce'd ever suspect the deceptive old thing was one of the world's finest cameras?"

A shrill succession of whistle blasts, as once upon a time before, sounded from the direction of the harbor.

Leguerre jumped to his feet.

"Is it so late?" he cried. "Jove! how you do annihilate the hours, Ann! Come along, if you're going to help me see Monteleone off for Washington—dear old chap, with his hat in one hand and his resignation in the other. Come, come! You know, I made a positive promise to Martel and Estrada that I'd be with 'em on the pier!"

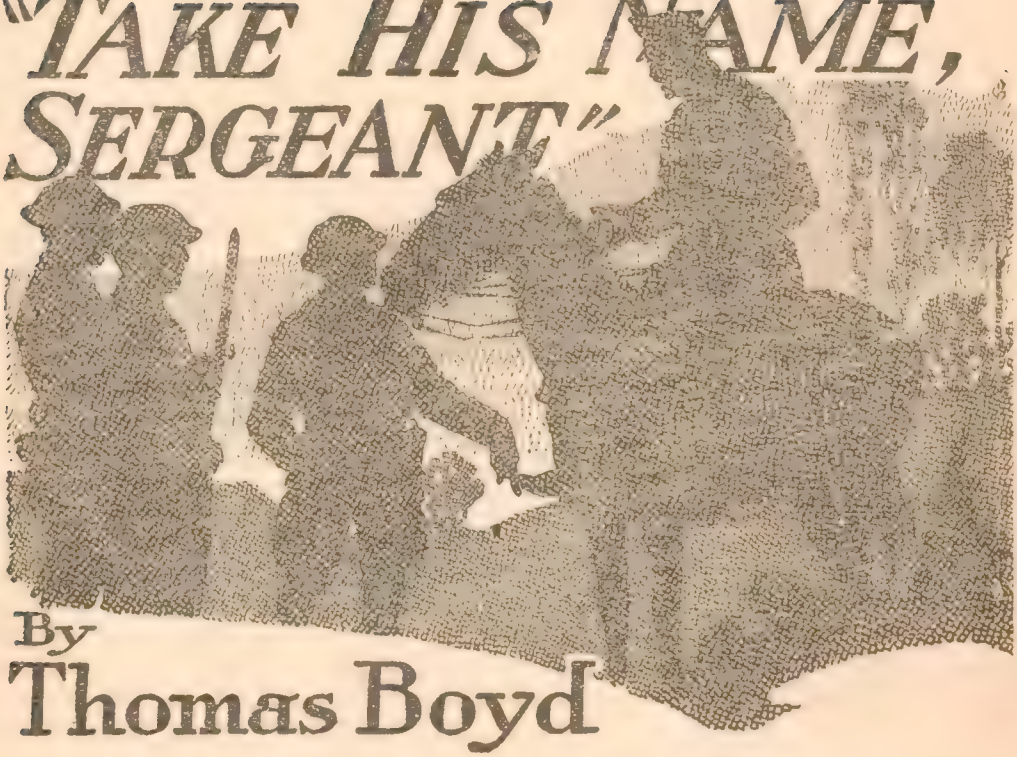
More Leguerre stories by Howard Fitzalan will appear in forthcoming issues of THE POPULAR.

SACRED PIPE OF THE ARAPAHOES

ALL Indian tribes have legends of the past, many of them going back to the Creation, and paralleling closely the accounts of the Creation as given in the Bible, and the Arapahoes are no different from others. In their legend of the beginning of things the Arapahoe is made the first man; to him appeared *Icvaneauthau*, the god of the Arapahoes, and gave into his keeping as evidence that they were the chosen people, the *Si Eja* (Flat Pipe).

This pipe, which is carefully preserved and in charge of the head medicine man of the tribe, has a small building of its own where only those who have gone through a purification of seven days' fasting may enter, is as sacred to the Arapahoes as was the Ark of the Covenant to the Hebrews. It is wrapped in silks and reposes in state on a sort of altar. It has never been seen by more than three or four white men, each of whom had become legally adopted members of the tribe. The stem of the pipe is a large reed about eighteen inches in length and the bowl is made of a stone, flattened on the sides, hollowed out into a bowl, with a small button, pierced by several tiny holes lying in the bottom of the bowl. None of the white men who have ever seen it could identify the reed or the stone from which it is made. When it becomes necessary to move the *Si Eja* on the occasion of a religious festival, it must be carried by the head medicine man or high priest in his arms as he would a baby and going on foot.

"TAKE HIS NAME, SERGEANT"



By
Thomas Boyd

Author of "Lugubrious Luke," Etc.

When a lieutenant forcibly arrests a general, it is something like putting one's head in a lion's jaws.

A COMPLETE STORY

TILTING back in his chair, Lieutenant Hesseltine pushed with his stubby fingers at the bottle of champagne on the café table. "Well," he reflected sadly, "it was a good old war while it lasted." Taking out his pipe, he added: "Hell of it is, it didn't last long enough."

"Aw," said Lieutenant Luby, who had jumped from a sergeantcy to a commission and now sat staring at the dregs in the bottom of his glass, "it lasted long enough. The trouble with it is the way it ended. No more armistices for me."

"Gentlemen," said O'Malley, reaching for the bottle and trying to balance it on the end of his nose, "it was a good old war and a rotten armistice; agreed. But why not come down to cases? It's this forty miles a day on the hoof and the damn——" The bottle toppled, eluded his hands and broke on the floor.

"Encore, madame!" called Hesseltine toward the diminutive bar.

"They don't compree French in Germany," chided Luby. He raised his voice as a black-haired woman in a high-necked dress came forward with a bar rag. *"Mein frau, auf wiedersehn gesundheit.* Another bottle, *bitte."*

"Ja," mein frau pointed sternly toward the wreck, *"fünf mark!"*

Lieutenant O'Malley threw a wad of paper money on the table and continued placidly:

"It's this forty miles a day on the

hoof and the inspectors from G. H. Q. that's made the old gray mare not what she used to be."

"The kid's clever," said Hesseltine. "'Doctor, diagnose this pain in my left ear.' 'Why, my man, you've got a pain in your left ear.'" He snorted satirically.

Mein frau returned with a full bottle of champagne. It was warm and sweet but they drank it. Since early dawn they had marched in a streaming column of troops through the mountainous country that lay between Belgium and the Rhine. Day after day they had twisted up and down long roads, keeping a specified distance from the withdrawing enemy, and there were many miles ahead before they would reach the right bank of the Rhine where they were to become part of the American Army of Occupation. Now it was night and they were billeted in a village on a hilltop which they had climbed in the darkness.

Luby rubbed his low, broad forehead, recollecting the brief but upsetting visit of an inspector from general headquarters the day before. "Just one more inspector like the bird that give us the cold once-over yesterday and you can mark me 'shell shocked' and shoot me back to a psychopathic ward."

"He *was* rancid, wasn't he?" agreed Hesseltine. "I heard the old boy way up at the head of the line. He was bawling: 'Kepting, this company's a disgrace to the American army.'"

"A disgrace, huh?" muttered Luby. "Why didn't you ask him why he wasn't along with us to help disgrace the army up at Belleau Woods or Soissons."

"Or St. Mihiel or at Blanc Mont in front of St. Etienne!" added Hesseltine.

"Or in the last two weeks of the Argonne," said O'Malley. The outfit had been in the midst of the Argonne when the armistice was signed. They were not far from Sedan and were prepared, in case the negotiations between the powers were unsuccessful, for a massed attack on Metz. And it was from the Argonne that they had begun their march northward on the heels of the withdrawing army. After eleven days of fighting, a week of lying in a rain-soaked forest and then an uninterrupted series of forced marches, they were in no shape for dress parade. Yet scarcely a day passed but what the column was held up while some neat officer from general headquarters stopped to express his scorn and indignation of a body of men that was unable to walk through mud without taking some of it along with them.

"Gets the 'Old Man' in bad up at divisional, too," said Hesseltine.

"You tell 'em," affirmed Luby. The Old Man was Major Spehr, commander of the battalion to which they belonged. He was a good field soldier but no man for the drill grounds, being too portly, too good-natured, too thoughtful of his men and not enough of a politician to smooth over his faults with the officers above him. He had been known to carry a ten-inch plug of tobacco protruding from his hip pocket on parade and to wear his coat with half the buttons unfastened, but he also had a way of standing calm in the midst of terrific bombardments, of protecting his men more than he protected himself and of seeing that they received their full rations and that those rations were well cooked.

O'Malley remained silent.

"A couple more reports from these wisecrackers at G. H. Q. and they'll shag him out of here into some desk job," said Hesseltine. "They" were the major general and his staff at divisional headquarters.

"Knock wood," said O'Malley and raised his glass. "Down this one to the Old Man—and no heel taps."

"You think so?" asked Luby. He had drunk his glass and had referred to Hesseltine's ominous remark that if

there were more complaints about the slovenliness of the battalion Major Spehr would be transferred to a non-combatant outfit. It was the major who had recommended Luby for his commission.

"Figure it out for yourself," said Hesseltine.

Luby pondered: "That'd be a rotten trick."

"And with this new brigadier they're rationing out to us," added O'Malley, "the Old Man's head won't be safe for a week. Now figure that out."

"Sure," Luby answered promptly; "I didn't come in the army yesterday. The jigadier will do his damnedest to make a good showing, being new to the outfit. So everybody from the windjammers up will have to step high and wide or lose their tails."

"Ain't you clever, though?" said Hesseltine and exhibited his small, white, even teeth in a friendly grin.

"No question about it, the boy's bright," confirmed O'Malley. He was acting company commander, their captain—a brave and efficient officer—having been riddled by Maxims beside a tank on the edge of the Meuse and O'Malley being senior lieutenant.

Luby flushed. "No kiddin', it'd be a damned shame if the Old Man lost his job."

Dryly O'Malley answered:

"Sure, why not ask President Wilson to make it an extra point and then he can have fifteen to fight for in Paris?" He shook the empty bottle and raised it for another balancing feat on his chin. "Watch Belle, the Beautiful Blonde Bal——"

Hesseltine lunged and retrieved the bottle.

"Too much is enough. Bust this," he warned, "and the old dame'll kick us out in the cold."

Outside there was a sound of pawing hoofs and creaking wheels and a long string of curses from a mule skinner. The three lieutenants looked up hopefully.

"I do believe——" began Hesseltine.

"I know it is," said O'Malley and stood up from the table. "No other company has a mule skinner with a string of cuss words like Riordan's." He went out into the chill darkness where a group of hungry soldiers stood waiting for the arrival of the field kitchen and supply wagon, which were grinding and wheeling up the steep hill to the accompaniment of mule skinners and messmen urging on the beasts of burden.

"You're a little late, Weaver," O'Malley told the mess sergeant. "We got here two hours ago."

"Yes, sir," said Weaver from the darkness; "but I ain't no mule myself." He jumped down from the wagon and, taking hold of a bridle, began: "Come along there, you walkin' bone yards!"

From one of the village barns came a rattle of mess kits and the cry of: "Chow—wow! Chow-w-w!"

"Chow hell!" called back a disgusted soldier. "They ain't even got the field kitchen set up yet."

But the men came forward anyway and would have remained hungrily standing about had not O'Malley commanded them:

"Back to your billets; chow won't be ready for another hour."

Grumbling, they disappeared. It was the usual routine of the march. The men were to have two meals a day, breakfast and supper, but they were only sure of one, for sometimes the field kitchens and supplies stuck fast on the routes up the hill roads which they were forced to climb. O'Malley returned to the café.

"When do we eat?" asked Hesseltine. "It's nine o'clock now."

"They're building a fire in the field kitchen now," said O'Malley.

"First thing we know it'll be five o'clock and time to shove off again,"

Luby muttered. In the country through which they were passing the villages were small, inaccessible and far apart. Yet it was the duty of all the units to keep dogging the enemy, or at least the former enemy, within a certain distance of its rear guard; and this made it necessary for companies and battalions to be strung out over the mountains at night and to turn down to the main road for the next day's march. O'Malley's company was five miles up from the regiment's line of march, another company of the battalion was two miles nearer the main road and the other two companies were billeted for the night in villages on the other side.

"We won't be any later than the rest," comforted O'Malley. He frowned conscientiously, for a sentry should have been posted long ago, but he had thought it better to let all of the men rest until after their evening meal.

At last the meal was cooked and a guard posted with special orders to halt all suspicious-looking characters and have them brought to the company commander's billet at once. The work done, the officers went to their beds and in the village there was nothing but silence and darkness.

As no suspicious-looking characters appeared during the night, Lieutenant O'Malley's sleep was undisturbed. And at dawn, after a breakfast of bread, bacon, molasses and black coffee, the company was on the march down a rocky, rutted road at the bottom of which they would join the battalion.

Major Spehr was already on the highway, standing with his adjutant in front of A Company. The major was six feet tall and weighed more than two hundred pounds which no amount of hard work and copious sweating seemed capable of reducing. His eyes were round, brown and trusting, his brows and lashes exceedingly light. He had a sandy mustache and his cheeks were chubby and pink. He was less of a soldier in appearance than in action. His legs bulged out over his boots, his waistline was a thing of the distant past and his shirts and coats, if they would fit him at all, had to be made to a special pattern of his own.

"Morning, O'Malley."

"Morning, major."

A Company, for the most part muddy and unshaven, standing with grounded arms, moved over to the right of the road as B Company filed down past it and formed in squads behind the left guide.

"Get anything to stick to your ribs last night?" asked the major.

"Had chow about ten o'clock," said O'Malley.

"You're lucky," put in the adjutant. "Our field kitchen broke down and we had to forage." He looked at Major Spehr.

The major rubbed his chin. "Bought the boys a quarter of beef—guess it was horse meat, though, from the way it tasted."

"No, sir," contradicted the right guide; he was only a sergeant but he had two medals from the five battle fronts on which he had fought with the major. "That was real good beef."

"Well," said Major Spehr, dismissing the matter, "cost me two hundred marks, whatever it was." He chuckled.

The two other companies of the battalion appeared plodding down a side road.

"Give way to the left!" shouted the major. The men shuffled over to the edge of the ditch and the two companies that had just arrived marched down beside them and joined up to the last squad of B Company.

"Faw-or-ward!" bellowed the major.

"Faw-or-ward," echoed the lieutenants and sergeants.

"Ho-o-ho!" ended the major ,and the long line strode ahead.

There was no sun that day and the road over which they marched wound

steadily upward. For eleven miles continued a gradual rise of six hundred feet, and that was only a part of the day's advance. The soldiers swung along, talking very little. Now and again a man would drop out of his squad formation and sit wearily by the roadside. Many of them had been burned by mustard gas in the Argonne, not badly enough for them to be sent to the hospital, but painfully enough to make thirty miles of daily hiking with a heavy pack a slow, agonizing affair. But most of them went uncomplainingly ahead, their eyes alert for details of this country whose people they had fought against for so many seemingly hopeless months. There was a kind of weirdness about going through this alien land on the heels of the withdrawing imperial army, and more than one man had apprehensions that this stubborn foe might turn back despite the terms of the armistice and make another warlike stand. But for this the doughboys were prepared, and carefully they scrutinized all people that showed themselves—old men, *fraus* and children in the little villages along the way. No one was exempt from examination.

The troops, now in a full regiment, reached Blankenheim in the afternoon and there entered the valley of the Ahr at its wall-inclosed source. They did not halt, but passing on O'Malley looked up the crags toward a heap of ruins, the remains of a medieval castle. It, too, had probably seen its share of fighting, he was thinking, when unexpectedly there was a hum of voices from the head of the column, "Way to the right, way to the right," and the tired doughboys moved toward the side of the road. Up in front chugged a motor cycle with a side car—at a standstill.

"Major, for Heaven's sake, what outfit is this!" The voice was irate and belonged to an inspecting colonel from general headquarters. The colonel was neat, smoothly shaven and powdered and his Sam Browne belt shone resplendently.

O'Malley saw Major Spehr scratch his ear and look puzzled.

"It's the first battalion of the Sixth, colonel."

"Well," said the colonel, moving his granite jaw, his cold eye alight, "it's the most slovenly outfit in the American army, and that's the report I shall make to General Harbinger."

Major Spehr grinned hopelessly.

The inspecting colonel went on to enumerate:

"Field kitchens a mess, stock not curried, men bedraggled and not shaved and marching all over the road."

Major Spehr tweaked his ear again.

"Now, about those field kitchens, colonel——"

But the colonel had given a signal to his driver and the motor cycle and side car spurted forward, leaving a trail of smoke and fumes from its exhaust.

No. 4 of the rear rank muttered after the retreating vehicle: "The damn spy! Like to see him——"

"That's enough," reprimanded O'Malley. Nevertheless, he was thinking the same thought that the private had spoken.

The rest of that day's march was made in an unpleasant silence. Down to the right in a rocky chasm tumbled the Ahr, a stream of silver among the sun-splashed rocks. To the left were the crags and boulders through which the road had been cut. By night they had passed Ahrhutte and B Company was winding up a steep, narrow road to an even tinier village that the billeting officer had picked out for them.

"Whew!" burst out Hesseltine, when the various platoons had been assigned to their billets and the lieutenants had gathered in the kitchen of the combined general store and café, "one more inspector and I'm ready to bust."

O'Malley took the bottle from which *mein frau* was dusting the cobwebs with

her apron. The scene was very much like that of the night before, except that the soldiers were at the bar and the officers in the kitchen.

"It's got so you can't laugh it off any longer," O'Malley admitted.

"The Old Man's still able to grin, though," said Luby.

"Hell," answered O'Malley, "he'd be able to work up a grin over his death warrant. That's just his way. Remember that time they had us stopped by that machine-gun *strondholt* in Belleau Woods and he ambled back after a trench mortar to blow 'em up?"

"Grinnin' like a kid with a new horn," added Hesseltine.

"Prosit," said O'Malley. They lifted their glasses and the bottle was half gone.

"Why don't," suggested Hesseltine, "somebody make a squawk to General Harbinger about it? Tell him we'll all be sick with inspectoritis if G. H. Q. doesn't snap out of it?"

"Sure," put in Luby; "it's not only this outfit, not by a damn sight. That inspector pulled the same stuff on the third battalion; I was talkin' to Lieutenant Wheeler when we stopped in Ahrhutte."

"Fine idea!" scoffed O'Malley. "Present a complaint to a major general and get a big laugh all around! When I want to get kicked I'll pick out a man with a smaller foot than what's inside of Harbinger's number twelves."

"No," said Hesseltine; "we'd never get rid of the nuisance that way."

"'Nuisance,'" echoed O'Malley. "That's a good word. Let's drink to it."

They drank to it.

"A public nuisance," supplied Hesseltine. "Drink to all inspectors as public nuisances, and no heel taps."

They drank to that.

"And spies to boot," said Luby.

"If they're spies they're bound to be suspicious-looking characters," said O'Malley, and there was the flicker of a curious, dancing light in his eyes.

"Ha-ha! Ho-ho! suspicious-looking characters! That calls for a new bottle. How did you ever happen to think of that?" Hesseltine leaned back, loosening his Sam Browne belt with one hand and pushing back his dark hair with the other.

"Because," O'Malley told him quietly, "I've got orders to arrest all suspicious-looking characters."

"Why, that's a fact," said Hesseltine. "So've we all."

"Sure, but what of it?" asked Luby.

"The boy's not so bright after all." He frowned at Luby but spoke to Hesseltine: "You think I'm not the man to do my duty?"

"What's the dope?" Luby wanted to know.

"When you've got orders to arrest suspicious-looking characters," said O'Malley coolly, "and you see a suspicious-looking character, what do you do about it?"

"You're cock-eyed," interrupted Hesseltine.

"He's kiddin'," Luby spoke uneasily. "He wouldn't do it."

"You think not?" O'Malley deliberately rolled and lighted a cigarette. "Watch me."

"We'll watch you, but when?"

"The next time some swivel-chair hero stops our column to bawl us out," said O'Malley.

Hesseltine smiled in disbelief.

Luby reiterated: "He's kiddin' us."

"Watch me," said O'Malley.

A slim, black-eyed private thrust his head inside the door. It was Epps, Lieutenant O'Malley's dog robber.

"Got your bedding roll for you, sir."

"Good!" replied O'Malley. And to the others: "I'm turning in for the night." He left the warm kitchen and went to his billet.

Before morning rain thudded rhythmically on the slate roofs of the village

and by dawn the solitary street was covered by a thin flood. It was the beginning of a day of misfortunes. The mess sergeant had no dry wood for the breakfast fire. He consulted O'Malley who, rather than have the men begin the march without coffee, told him to do as well as he could about hurrying the meal and said that if the company was delayed it would have to be delayed. Twenty minutes later, the company reached the highroad that wound down the Ahr valley. There it was discovered that Major Spehr had been called to headquarters.

"What headquarters?" O'Malley asked Lieutenant Wheeler of A Company.

Lieutenant Wheeler shrugged:

"Regimental or divisional, I don't know which."

"There!" said Luby gloomily. "Gone up to be bawled out. It's his turn this time." He walked back to his platoon and the column began moving forward through the mud.

O'Malley hurried ahead toward the leading squad, looking for the adjutant. But the adjutant had got a ride on a field kitchen and was not to be found. It sounded reasonable enough that Major Spehr had been sent up to headquarters to receive a reprimand, and the thought of it put a reckless gleam in O'Malley's eyes. For nine months the battalion had got along very well without molestation from anybody, but now since the war was over it seemed that the outfit was no longer of any account, its numerous successes in the field forgotten. That was irritating to a soldier who had loyalty for an organization in which he had fought. It was worse because of the injustice to Major Spehr who was a capable man and whom everybody liked. O'Malley bit his lips and fumed.

Lieutenant Wheeler joined him at the head of the column.

"Glad we're going downhill at last," he said cheerfully. "Field kitchens can slide all the way and maybe they'll be on hand to-night."

"Sure," said O'Malley abstractedly. "What'd the Old Man go up to headquarters for?"

"Seems to me," Lieutenant Wheeler answered slowly, "I remember him saying something about the new brigadier sending for him, but I'm not sure. That *schnapps* got *to* me."

Worse and more of it, thought O'Malley. If the new brigadier, who couldn't have arrived more than a day earlier, was already calling for the Old Man, it meant there was hell to pay, was his opinion.

"Say," began Lieutenant Wheeler, "who takes charge while the major's gone?" The Argonne had taken a full toll of the battalion's captains—two being dead and two in hospital. "Who's senior, you or Hepley?"

"I'm senior to Hepley," announced O'Malley.

"All right, major!" Wheeler stiffened to attention and made him a mock salute.

The long column sloshed on through the mud.

In the late afternoon, when the blue of the tree-covered rocks had spread over the valley with the approach of dusk, there sounded hoofbeats from ahead and a tall horseman in helmet and slicker rounded a boulder. In a moment the mount drew up and a sharp voice above the prancing legs called sharply down:

"Lieutenant, what's this outfit?"

"Bat-tal-ion!" sang out O'Malley to the rear.

"Bat-tal-ion!" echoed lieutenants and sergeants.

"Halt!" shouted O'Malley. The column stopped. O'Malley turned to the stranger, his eyes dancing. Another of these inspectors! "It's part of the American army, sir."

The stranger, obviously an officer,

stared down incredulously. He was very spare and erect and a little jaunty.

"Certainly! But what outfit?"

O'Malley hesitated. "The first of the Sixth, sir." Being held up like this on the last lap of the day's march stiffened the legs of the men, adding to O'Malley's grievances of which he had a generous list by now.

The stranger leaned forward, one hand on the horse's shoulder.

"Lieutenant, what's your name?"

"My name?" asked O'Malley calmly. "I'm Lieutenant O'Malley, sir."

"O'Malley, eh! Well, where are your superior officers?"

"I'm in charge at present, sir." Under this catechism O'Malley gnawed his lip.

The stranger's eyes roved over the soldier's muddy puttees, then rested on O'Malley's splashed-up boots. A rebuke was evidently forthcoming and during the last two weeks o'Malley had been fed up on rebukes. Snatching the rôle of inquisitor from the stranger he asked:

"What's your name, sir?"

"My name!" The stranger started with surprise. "What business is that of yours?" His voice was cold with displeasure.

"Good deal," answered O'Malley. "Got your dog tag?"

"My dog tag!" The stranger was outraged, or appeared to be.

"Yes, sir," went on O'Malley stubbornly; "your identification tag."

"Dammit, man!" the stranger broke off. "You expect me to carry one of those things?

"Yes, sir, I do." O'Malley half lifted his wrist which was encircled by a silver bracelet with his name and that of his organization engraved on it. "Got one myself."

"See here——" began the stranger sternly.

"Where did you get that American slicker, sir?" asked O'Malley. "You got any papers to prove you're an officer in the American army?"

"Why, damn your hide!" the stranger exploded wrathfully.

"I thought not," said O'Malley. He turned his head, commanding crisply: "First squad! No. 3 of the front rank, No. 3 rear rank; fall out with fixed bayonets." He reached for the horse's bridle. "Off you come, sir."

"Take care; you're speaking to a general officer, lieutenant——"

"Mebbe so," said O'Malley. He'd gone too far now not to carry it through.

The stranger looked at the two serious-minded doughboys with fixed bayonets, glared down at O'Malley and wrathfully declared:

"You've made this the sorriest day of your career, lieutenant. I'm General Fadiman."

"Yes, sir," said O'Malley. "Look out for the mud when you dismount, sir." He addressed the two privates: "Fall in behind A Company with your prisoner."

"Step lively," ordered No. 3 of the front rank, bringing down his bayonet at whose point he had herded many an enemy soldier only a few weeks before.

"Battalion!" shouted O'Malley.

"Battalion!" echoed lieutenant and sergeants.

"Forward, hr-rch!" commanded O'Malley, and the long line moved onward.

"Boy," breathed Lieutenant Wheeler at the end of an awed gasp, "I kiss you good-by and say, 'Lord help you.'"

O'Malley himself felt a little shaky. He did not feel safe with a general officer walking behind him even though the officer was under guard. But he hid this feeling stubbornly and said:

"Damn inspectors! Be a good lesson to the whole bunch."

Darkness came, but the march continued. O'Malley knew where the battalion was to be billeted, but there was no one to tell him where regimental,

brigade or divisional headquarters would be that night. He had thought to send his prisoner up to the colonel with a note. However, this could not be done without first knowing where the colonel was to be found. Thus, when the battalion came to the road where his company was to turn off, he still had the stranger on his hands.

As the company turned off the main road toward a village a mile distant, Lieutenants Hesseltine and Luby hurried up to the head of the column. Both of them looked like hunted rabbits. Hesseltine said to O'Malley:

"That old boy'll skin you alive. What did you pull off such a fool stunt for?"

O'Malley knew he was in a mess but had determined he would not back down. It was too late now, anyway. In the beginning of the joke he had thought that he would send the officer up to regimental headquarters, where the colonel in command would be likely to help the jest by passing the prisoner on up to brigade headquarters. But that was before he had discovered him to be a general. No colonel would run a risk like that with a general. And, besides, O'Malley had no notion of where the colonel could be found He said:

"What are you crabbin' about, Hesseltine? It's my party."

"Your party all right," agreed Hesseltine. "But what're you going to do about it?"

"Oh," said O'Malley coolly, "lock him up all night and send him up to regimental in the morning."

Luby whistled.

"He'll kill you sure. What'd he say his name was—Fadiman?"

"Something like that," said O'Malley, and added brazenly: "Never heard of it."

"You will, old boy," said Hesseltine.

The company reached its billets in the little village, but remained in ranks while O'Malley looked for a place suitable for a jail. After investigating several barns and houses he discovered a small, bare room in the building to which the shed for the field kitchen was attached. Then, guided by his flash light, he returned to the waiting column and called for the guards to bring forth their prisoner. The guards obeyed promptly and O'Malley was glad of the concealing darkness as they passed, for it saved him from meeting the malignant stare which he could well imagine to be on the general's face.

That night there was no gayety, no tilting of glasses in the dark little hole where a crippled old man sold the wine, pale beer and *schnapps*. The soldiers stood about or sat in their candle-lit billets with uneasy curiosity and the other lieutenants rather avoided O'Malley. It was not usual to have a brigadier general under guard in a company's camp, and the opinion was that it would turn out badly. But O'Malley disguised what nervousness he felt and listened to reports of the strange officer without ward calm.

"I don't believe he's a general at all, sir," Corporal Hathaway informed him, after taking a new guard as relief to the temporary jail. "He took his slicker off and I saw an eagle on his shoulder, and no general I ever heard of'd wear a colonel's eagle!"

O'Malley pondered that, his mind following up the explanation that the stranger was really suspicionable and had got hold of a uniform that did not belong to him. But that was too good to be true, O'Malley reflected. There was no luck in the world that would enable a lieutenant to pay a grudge against G. H. Q. inspectors, have the affair seem like a sorry joke and then brighten happily at the end with the discovery that the pseudo-inspector had really been a spy. No, he couldn't hope for that.

Later more news came that the general, whom O'Malley had become afraid of approaching, was taking his captivity

peaceably. For this O'Malley was so grateful that he had his orderly send in his own bedding roll to the jail.

"What did he say?" asked O'Malley as Epps returned.

They were in the lieutenant's billet and Epps grinned.

"Said, 'Much obliged, son; this'll do me nicely.'"

"Didn't seem sore or anything?" O'Malley queried anxiously.

"No, sir," said Epps. "I guess he figured there was no use boilin' up any more about it."

O'Malley rolled a cigarette with hands that were none too steady.

"Go see if chow's ready yet; if it is, have Weaver cut me off an extra slice of steak. And here"—he reached in his pocket and withdrew a wad of marks—"pick me out the best bottle of wine you can rake up."

The orderly went out. O'Malley sat thinking that if the general was a good sport, which he seemed to be from the reports, he might as well be made comfortable and that perhaps it would mitigate his wrath. Stranger things had happened. O'Malley was beginning to feel himself to be in a bad way.

Half an hour went by and he heard his orderly bumping at the door.

"What is it?" he called.

"Got my hands full. Can you lift the latch for me, sir?" asked Epps through the door.

O'Malley strode forward. There stood Epps with two mess kits in his hand and a bottle tucked under his arm. "Good!" O'Malley said. "Take the bottle and the biggest one to our friend in the jail."

But Epps shook his head.

"Guess you'll have to eat both of 'em, sir. The old boy's cleared out."

O'Malley started.

"Cleared out! Did those damned sentries——"

Again Epps shook his head.

"No, sir, he didn't get past the sentries. He went through a window in the back and took his horse to boot."

O'Malley whistled and sat limply on the edge of the quilted bed.

"Seems to me like he must 'a' been a spy, after all," said Epps.

O'Malley nodded, looking at the floor.

"Go find Lieutenants Hesseltine and Luby," he muttered. The orderly hurried out and O'Malley sat there, his head feeling as stuffy as a ball of cotton. After a while he jumped up and began pacing the floor. Luby and Hesseltine found him walking back and forth when they came in.

"You've heard the dope?" he shot at them.

"Don't that beat hell?" asked Hesseltine. "I guess that was a pretty good arrest you made, after all!"

"It sure is queer, and the corporal on watch said he had eagles on his shoulder, not even a general's stars," said Luby.

"Well," they asked, staring at one another, "what'll we do about it?"

"Send out a couple of searching parties," suggested Hesseltine. "One down the road and the other over the hill."

"Lot of good that'd do when he's got a horse," objected O'Malley.

"I feel like I was drunk." Luby laughed uncertainly and looked down at his large, brown hands.

"Well," said O'Malley sharply and stood up, tightening his pistol belt.

"Where you going?" asked Hesseltine.

"To that jail." O'Malley strode out of the room and into the night. A sentry still stood in the doorway near the field kitchen and O'Malley hailed him: "You sure you didn't turn that prisoner loose?"

"Law-see no!" denied the guard. "He was jist heah one minute an' gone the next, sir. Right outen the window."

O'Malley investigated the window with his searchlight. The upper and

lower sashes had been removed and the frame was now but a pale square of moonlight. "All right," he told the sentry; "you're relieved." He felt tired and in a muddle. Was that jaunty bird a general or a spy? He'd have given more than his pay to know.

However, it wasn't long until his question was answered. As he stood by the field kitchen there was the noise of a heavily moving body in the cobble-stoned street, a puffing and breathing of a large man after a long climb. The voice of Major Spehr called:

"Where's Lieutenant O'Malley."

O'Malley ran forward. "Here, sir!" He had a good deal more than that to say.

"Huh—O'Malley—huh—want to—huh—talk to you." Major Spehr was winded.

"Yes, sir," said O'Malley, and led the way to his billet. Hesseltine and Luby were still there and had the bottle of wine between them.

"Boys," began Major Spehr, with a wry grin, "I'm in a fix and I guess I'm liable to be in a worse one."

O'Malley leaned forward attentively, trying not to feel guilty.

Major Spehr grinned tiredly again.

"Where's General Fadiman?"

The three lieutenants eyed one another in surprise.

"He's gone, sir."

Major Spehr puffed.

"What'd he say when you turned him loose?"

"Turned himself loose," said O'Malley.

"That's just like him." Major Spehr blinked and reached for the wine bottle.

"You know him? Who is he, sir?"

Slowly Major Spehr wiped his lips.

"Used to. He's the new brigade commander."

"Wow!" said O'Malley as if some one had unexpectedly struck him. "Of course," he added after a moment, "I was to blame for the whole thing."

Major Spehr's eyes lighted with a weary humor.

"That's not much help. Makes it worse," he went on, "because Harbinger had us all up on the carpet at divisional this morning."

"About these damned inspectors' reports, sir?" asked Luby.

Major Spehr grunted.

"And he pitched into me harder than into any of 'em. Said I always did have the sloppiest battalion in the regiment. And now with this on top of it——" His face took on a woefully humorous expression. "I just got back a couple of hours ago and when Wheeler told me you'd arrested Fadiman I thought, 'Good Lord, good night!' "

O'Malley straightened with resolution.

"I'll fix it, sir; I'll go up to divisional and tell General Harbinger I was tight."

Major Spehr rubbed his forehead perplexedly.

"I don't want you to do that. I know you did it for the best."

"Sure," put in Luby. "He just thought he was another inspector from G. H. Q. How was he to know he was a general? Besides, he didn't even have his stars."

"He's just been promoted from a colonelcy in the first division," said Major Spehr, "and I don't suppose he's had a chance to buy any. I wonder," he continued reminiscently, "if they still call him by his old-time nickname—'The Ring-tailed Roarer?' "

O'Malley felt like shuddering. The name had a sinister sound.

"Where is divisional headquarters, major?"

"At Antweiler till to-morrow night," sighed Major Spehr, "both divisional and brigade. But don't make a fool of yourself."

O'Malley laughed bitterly. "No danger; I guess nature beat me to it."

Major Spehr looked at him in embarrassment:

"Pshaw, O'Malley, you're a damned fine officer."

"Thanks," said O'Malley in the same tone as before. "Where's Antweiler, sir?"

The major frowned. "About ten miles up the line. But you're not going there?"

"Not to-night," said O'Malley and began to unlace his boots.

Major Spehr looked at him, shook his head and heavily went out. Hesseltine and Luby followed. Left alone, O'Malley loosened his clothes, put out the candle and, after a while, fell asleep.

He was the first man stirring in the camp that morning and he left before the others had started breakfast. The least he could do, he had decided, was to get to General Harbinger as soon as possible with his confession so that the blame would center entirely upon himself and not upon the battalion as a whole. Walking quickly, he reached Antweiler at about eight o'clock and was directed by a sentry to divisional headquarters. They were in a tall, stone building which had a deep reception hall.

"General Harbinger up yet?" he asked a gray-haired sergeant major on duty by the door.

"Yes, sir, but he's busy."

O'Malley sat down in the tall, straight-backed chair beside the threshold of General Harbinger's room. He had been there about two minutes when the general's aid came out. O'Malley stood up quickly.

"How soon can I see General Harbinger?"

"You'll have to wait," the aid told him. "What's your name?"

"Lieutenant O'Malley."

The aid appeared surprised.

"Good! I was just going to call a messenger to go after you."

O'Malley's heart flopped. The general, he reasoned, must be in a fury, sending for him so early.

The aid reëntered the general's room and almost immediately returned.

"You can come in, lieutenant."

"Uh—what's that?" O'Malley fumbled uneasily with his hat and walked in.

General Harbinger, his wooden face surmounted by a mop of jet black hair, sat behind a table on the edge of which a tall, lean officer was perched, swinging his leg and evidently pointing and wagging his finger as he talked. His back was to O'Malley, but there was something horribly familiar about his voice and figure. He was saying vociferously:

"I tell you for a fact, you listen to that bunch of swivel-chair heroes and you won't have a fighting man left in your outfit!"

"Lieutenant O'Malley, sir!" announced the aid.

O'Malley stood there moistening his dry lips while two pairs of eyes focused on him.

General Harbinger cleared his throat to speak; but General Fadiman interrupted:

"Let me talk to this man."

The major general nodded, and O'Malley felt as if he'd better move toward the wall for support. But his feet were too heavy for him to be able to move.

General Fadiman fixed him with stern eyes.

"You got anything against me, lieutenant?"

O'Malley stared back doggedly, stammering: "M-m-no, sir."

"Do you often play practical jokes on your superiors?"

"No, sir."

"Then what in hell did you put me under arrest for?"

"I thought," began O'Malley, "I thought—well, you see, sir——"

"Don't scare the man to death," said General Harbinger. "Out with it, lieutenant."

"I thought," said O'Malley, "I thought you were an inspector, sir."

"An inspector, eh!" General Fadiman snorted and tapped the end of an unlighted cigarette on the table. "Well, how in the devil would that excuse you even if I had been an inspector? Answer me that!"

O'Malley flushed.

"We've had a lot of 'em around since we've been on this hike, sir. Almost every day one of 'em splashes past and stops to bawl hell out of us." The recollection infuriated him and he went on: "They've got the idea that we can walk through mud without gettin' in any of it, and that we can hike thirty miles a day and still keep dressed up as well as if we were in barracks."

"Exactly," said General Fadiman.

"Sir?" asked O'Malley, startled.

"Exactly," repeated General Fadiman. He turned to General Harbinger. "Do you know what to do with that bunch of reports now?"

General Harbinger passed his hand over his mouth.

"I suppose the room *is* chilly enough for a little fire," he said gravely.

"Righto," agreed General Fadiman.

"However," General Harbinger spoke thoughtfully, eying O'Malley coldly. "discipline must be maintained and refractory officers punished."

O'Malley was ready for that and willing to accept it.

"Shall we say thirty days," continued the divisional commander, "in Nice?"

General Fadiman chuckled.

"I suggest thirty days in Paris; that's where I'd like to go." And he looked at O'Malley a little wistfully.

An old favorite of THE POPULAR *readers will be in next week's issue, with "For the Honor of Gros Brun," a short story. The author—yes, that's correct—is Holman Day.*

NON-SLEEPING INVENTORS

MANY persons take with a grain of salt the persistent legend that Thomas Edison gets only four or five hours of sleep a day. Doctor George E. Vincent, president of the Rockefeller Foundation, calls it a "myth." "Edison takes naps in the daytime and probably gets the normal amount of sleep," he told the young ladies of Barnard College, recently, probably in an effort not to encourage all-night parties.

Now, however, comes the grandson of Arthur Sirois, an inventive tinkerer who for half a century ran a watchmaker's shop at 66 Nassau Street, New York, to say that his grandparent and the electrical wizard were cronies in the early days of Edison's experiments, and that the two frequently worked all night together. He declares that he never knew his grandfather to sleep, and it might well be that Edison acquired the habit of wakefulness from him.

The grandson now lives in Mount Vernon, N. Y., and recounts how Edison used to come to the house and how after a short visit he and Mr. Sirois would repair to the watchmaker shop. Edison was then working on the incandescent lamp. The two would be there still, fresh and enthusiastic, next morning when employees came to work. Mr. Sirois, the grandson says, did not think much of his friend's electrical contraptions. But he lived to see them mark an era in human ingenuity. Sirois himself worked on a watch movement without a hair spring. It never materialized. He sat at his bench night after night, month on month. Whether he slept much or not at all he worked right up to a few years ago, when he died at the age of eighty-four years.

The Gilded Weakling

By

Will Beale

In Five Parts—Part III

Author of "Seed of Glory," "The Splendid Poltroon," Etc.

Jerry Wayne, a wealthy New Yorker, gets on a ship while drunk and lands in a Newfoundland fishing town. He is broke and cannot communicate with friends until the next boat arrives. He goes to the fish-shipping plant and finds, as head of it, a girl, Margaret Mendeth. She is kind to him, but mentally compares him unfavorably with the stalwart Newfoundland men. But she gives him work. Labor comes hard to Wayne, but he is a good sport, and keeps on until the boat comes. He tries to save an old man from drowning, and fails. For his failure he is despised, for the code of the country is strength. He feels now that he must stay and clear his name. He helps Hitty Crowe, granddaughter of the dead man, and Margaret Mendeth gives her a place in her household. A romance has developed between Hitty and Alf, Margaret's deaf-and-dumb brother. Margaret has come to respect Wayne and to seek his advice. She invites him to dinner, and the two discover their love. Margaret goes away on a business trip, and Wayne has a serious encounter with Luke Mockford, a bestial character who has insulted Hitty.

CHAPTER X.

THE YOUNG MAN FROM NEW YORK.

ALL along its busy course at the foot of the mountainside the town of Pulp Works was sending up giant wavering pillars of smoke and steam, sending them high into the clear, still morning.

Swinging along down the railroad track from upriver came the girl from Harbour la Grand. In her doeskin knickers and high leather boots, with a soft little felt hat pulled down over her hair, she looked much like some boyish young prospector.

Coming out by some freight sheds, she stopped and looked far along the new-built town clambering up the hills. In spite of herself, she knew a little saddening fall within her. It seemed, somehow, a violation, this place of Pulp Works. At a glance modern civilization had swooped fair upon the very inner solitudes of her cherished Newfoundland, and fastened there blatantly.

All along the river, the valley was peopled unbeautifully with a swarm of great structures in steel and concrete, the very last word in an efficient civilization. Stacks and towers and turrets shot skyward in frantic emulation. Long, low sheds and storehouses like prodigious caterpillars crawled sluggishly upon the levels along the river. The hills resounded to a harsh clamor of industry.

The town itself seemed characteristic. Varied abodes, ranging in type from the artfully simple bungalows of the executive force to the plain matter-of-fact company boarding house, clambered over one another up the wooded slopes. Workmen in swarms were tearing away at the hills, slashing off the growth close to the soil and blasting out the roots. Modern industry was now being planted here, and planted deep.

The girl left the roadbed for the main street. A couple of sheep, bedraggled, confused creatures, wandered across the road, their nervously huddling feet glistening with crude oil, their fleeces blackened with coal smoke.

Margaret passed along the lower levels in the direction of the company offices. A score of heads followed her in wonderment. Her odd un-Newfoundland attire, the calm composure of her striking beauty, left a trail of wondering employees in her wake.

In the big general office she was received with deference that masked a deep curiosity but ill. She was turned over to a chief clerk who in turn conducted her into one of the private offices of the management. She was at her journey's end.

It was curious, her interview with this man. There was deep and obvious surprise in his face at mention of her errand. He began to question her, and from the first she felt something of the scope of this new venture in Newfoundland and its contact with both the country and the times. She felt, too, that of necessity a project of this sort must move slowly, must feel its way with deliberation.

"Just what is your object in offering your holdings just now?" the man asked at length.

She smiled an odd little smile.

"It begins to look like a swap in the matter of development. You see, I am of the fish people. Among my people, fish has been tradition for many years. I know little of timber, or development such as yours. I see an opportunity for more development in my own line of business, and in planning for this I am offering you a chance to further your own."

The man was smiling upon her gravely.

"You must pardon me—we know something of your fine activity on the south coast. Seeing you, a man cannot but wonder at your own outlook on things, and, of course, we are very interested in all pertaining to this country." And then, at length, "I am not prepared, of course, to give you a decision at the moment," the man said to her. "You understand, Miss Mendeth, that we are comparatively new here at Pulp Works. You can understand, also, how carefully we must proceed for the present." He paused for a moment and asked: "When do you return to the coast?"

She smiled, quietly.

"When I get your decision," she said.

A young man came in, a most prepossessing young man, and, for all his youth, evidently on the management force. He stood smiling ingratiatingly while he was being introduced.

"I'm afraid I broke in intentionally, Miss Mendeth, when I heard you were here. You see, every one knows of you down there on the south coast. It strikes me you are one of the most noted features of interest in all that section."

There was nothing forward about it.

It would have been difficult to resist his clean young decency.

"I did not know that," the girl smiled back. "And I am afraid you make me feel rather cumbersome—like our scenery and other characteristics."

He grinned, openly admiring now. "Well, you have been described to us as anything but cumbersome." He sobered a bit. "Are we going to take on any of your timber holdings?" He turned to the other man inquiringly.

The older man answered him.

"I have told Miss Mendeth that we would take it into conference when some of our directors arrive for our mid-year meeting next week, and advise her later."

The younger man turned to the girl. 'Where are you stopping, Miss Mendeth?"

He listened with frank surprise to her reply.

"I am at camp about five miles up the Humber."

"Not alone?" There was sharp concern in it.

"No. My brother is with me."

"Splendid! Then I am promising myself to see you again. Meanwhile, I'm going down to see you off."

He escorted her down to the wharfs. On the way, he spoke to the girl rather eagerly:

"I'm going to confess a particular reason for wishing to see you, Miss Mendeth." He broke off to commandeer a mahogany speed boat lying moored at the foot of some steps, and give a command to have his companion conveyed up around the bend to where her own boat waited. "Briefly, I'm from the States, although most of us here were assembled from Canada or over across. My name's Carhart, Jimmy Carhart, and my own home is in New York. Some time ago I had a letter from friends reporting that a certain chap of our acquaintance, a young man of some importance, had been seen here in Newfoundland somewhere on the south coast in your section."

The speed boat with a deferential young operator in charge lay waiting at the foot of the steps.

"This chap was a college chum of mine," her escort was saying. "Name's Wayne—Jerry Wayne. I'm wondering if you ever heard of him down there."

Now she was regarding him intently, curiously.

"Yes, I know him," she said.

He had handed her aboard the boat.

"You don't mean it, really!" he cried out eagerly. The engine burst into a muffled roar. "Tell you what!" he called out. "You and I must visit a little about this before your return. I myself will run upriver with the Works' decision. You can tell *me* about Wayne, and I'll tell *you* about him."

The launch was already moving away with swiftly increasing speed. The young man stood on the landing, waving his arm.

Several times through the next few days, Margaret Mendeth found herself wondering about Jimmy Carhart and what he would have to tell her about Jerry Wayne.

In quiet, reflective hours going about the simple duties of camp, it dawned on her with startling simplicity: how very little she knew of Wayne, or Wayne of her. For two people who had confessed their love it was almost absurd. In reality their attraction seemed to be based on what they *felt* to be true of each other, the qualities they assumed for each other, rather than upon any actual knowledge.

Now, in her brief period away from him, she was analyzing Wayne profoundly, was going over their brief relations almost mercilessly. It was not that she sought to unearth defects in the man merely for that alone. It was simply that her love for him seemed so great that she wanted to safeguard it forever. And it seemed that by recognizing his

shortcomings frankly she would thus be equipped to lend him greatest help, support, coöperation.

Wayne had branded himself a weakling. But up to the time of his arrival in Newfoundland he had been simply a product of the life he had lived. And now the life he was living here was having its opposite effect. Compassed all about by this country's hard, unyielding strength he was reacting to it splendidly. She thought of the vigorous air of superb bodily well-being that he had taken on, a thing reflected in the very spirit of him. The girl's heart warmed a bit at thought of his handsome, alert manliness.

In spirit—here a great warm flush of pride in him swept her—in his spirit of spirit, she thought, Wayne was a man of honor—inviolable honor, according to his code. She was sure of this. It was this that had appealed to her. It was this element in him to which she reached out with all her confidence. It was this upon which she builded.

And then, early one morning she saw from the lofty camp a swift launch threading up the river. Hurriedly she went down the trail to a tiny abutment on the shore below the camp and waited. There was but the one man in the boat—the operator—and sweeping into the landing he handed her a letter. It was from the young man, Carhart:

DEAR MISS MENDETH: I regret very much to report that in conference on the matter of your timber holdings it was decided not to take advantage of your kindly offer just at this time. I am requested to state that within the year we propose to take the matter up with you again, with a view to definite purchase.

To this I am adding my own personal regret that I am unable to bring you the message in person as planned some days ago. This is not now possible, as I am called away.

Please believe me, most sincerely yours.

Even in the first rush of her deep disappointment, Margaret knew it to be not entirely over the matter of the timberland. She knew now that she had been looking forward eagerly to the meeting with this young man because they were to discuss Jerry Wayne. In the meeting planned she was to learn about him—was to hear another speak of him. The girl did not often allow herself to harbor disappointment but, now, this thing sank deep, threatened to become an obsession.

She read the letter a second time. There was no prospect of seeing the young man Carhart again. And, as to the pulp lands, later, perhaps, they would buy. Meanwhile, there was nothing to do but return to Harbour le Grand.

CHAPTER XI.

A GLIMPSE OF POWER.

A WARM sun, beaming down straight and cloudless, steamed and stewed Harbour le Grand into a dead, muggy apathy. Glutted with constantly arriving fish the little place staggered and sagged about its labors and fell constantly behind.

Since July came in, the shore fishing had broken all records. Some trend of feed, some combination of conditions held secret in the mysterious workings of the sea, had sent fish inshore. For a time, the catch of the countless motor boats seemed almost to rival the runs of the Bankers. Men were scarce. The crews were overworked. Old Batron plodded about endlessly day after day. Wayne was burning himself fiercely like an acetylene flame.

And now since morning did the day promise to become hopeless. Motor boats with gunwale cargoes of green fish had been packed close about the Mendeth wharfs since early morning. Wayne, without breakfast for three hours, sat in the shade of the sheds with Dave Calder, snatching hurriedly at food. Wayne was a strange-looking Wayne these days. There was a great fresh-healing bruise up under his hair.

One side of his face was mottled with discolorations. On his feet he limped a little.

Suddenly Dave caught his arm.

"Dere's de old 'ooman, b'y. Wonner what she'm doin' about de shore?"

Wayne saw the splendidly heroic figure of Hagar Mendeth, impressive in a simple black dress, passing imperturbably in and out among the sheds. "Dave," he said impulsively, between mouthfuls, "what's back of that woman? For all her silence, when she's about you feel like you were standing before a mountain."

Dave gulped at a bannock of bread.

"There's main hard life and, I expec', Heaven itself back o' she, sir! On ahl dis coast ever since I can remember there's been de fish, sir, there's been de clipper boats, sir, and there's been Hagar Doone. She'm a big woman, sir, able like a man, and no man tricks her, but de Lord never made a safter woman inside." Dave swallowed himself free. "She coom from up alahng this coast, Deadman's Harbor, sir, a hard place, sir, like most o' thim on this coast. De sea got ahl her menfolk one by one. So she grew up pretty much alone. They do tell that she could handle a boat like a man. That she used to take her own craft to de Labbydor for de fishin'. And in all de country they say, sir, no man could break Hagar Doone's record with a splitt'n' knife."

In his interest Dave had forgotten his food. Wayne gulped away, and listened intently. About them the crews swarmed wearily.

"She coom alahng about to be married, sir, to one o' de finest men o' de coast. And one day de sea got him, too. They say that when they brought'n ashore, Hagar Doone sat for hours on de rocks like a block o' stone, starin' at de sea that had got her ahl. That night she disappeared—away from Newfoundland. A schooner from de States had left de harbor dat night. De crew was a turrible bad lot, sir, but every one thought dat Hagar had left de country wid 'em, same as young girls in many Newfoundland outplaces had done."

Amid all the rush of things Wayne, too, had stopped eating.

"Nobody knows more abaht that, sir, or what happened or what country got her. But after a year Hagar Doone came back, sir. Newfoundland, arter ahl, was de only country for de bigness o' a woman de likes o' she. Back wid her she had brought a little babby that is now Big Alf. At that time on this coast a foreigner by de name o' Mendez had begun to do business. This man chased Hagar Doone night and day, they do say, because she was a better fishman than he was himself. And finally she married him. That's all un knows, sir."

By noon things clogged. A dull, deadened apathy seemed to have fallen upon the overworked splitters in the shade of the sheds. The sun stared down inimically. The sea, glassy and indifferent, flashed unmerciful barrages of searing light in upon the struggle, endlessly. Wayne made of himself, his body, his fertile brain, his wit, an eccentric automaton. For once he did not reach these men—sunk in their weary lethargy.

By mid-afternoon the day apparently marked defeat.

Then something came among the men like a great galvanizing current of electricity.

Hagar Mendeth came quietly to the splitters' shed—an odd, arresting figure. In men's oilskins she looked so strange—like some gently handsome man of vague distinction, with yet the impress of a magnificent woman. With scarce a word she had a splitting table moved so that it would face the line. On an impulse she doffed the cumbersome oilskin coat, showing immaculate

gingham beneath. She stood, a great, true daughter of a raw and rugged land. A sobered hush had fallen, the woman's personality merging upon the others like a buoyant wave. With a single sweep of her hand she thrust up her sleeve.

Wayne, staring wonderingly, caught his breath. A terrible, jagged scar like a searing white flame slashed a zigzag course down the firm, white, powerfully molded arm from an evidently deeper source above. It filled the man with awe. What terrible things of her life's history were recorded indelibly in that scar?

All about, the men held themselves quiet in a profound respect. The "idler" for her table set forth his round fish as though making offering to royalty of ancient lineage. Already, the machinery of dressing gang and splitters had begun to speed up as though new fuel had been applied to its energies.

The woman came into action.

There was no hesitance in her attack, no fumbling uncertainty. With the seizing of her knife, she became an expert human machine, a machine that leaped into its maximum of action at the start. A marvel of odd human efficiency grew in that place. The woman's hands, arms, flashed like shuttles, never oversped, with never a hair of lost motion, everything governed faultlessly by a perfectly coördinated mind. And the marvel grew.

The slashing of steel among the gang of splitters rose to a sibilant storm, like hail slithering on leaves; like more hail, and still more—like hail rushing in a great coarse hissing whisper! A world of hail in a swift, slickering tumult—driven by a fierce wind!

Some tremendous spirit had emerged from out the years, had come down from the remote high places of the ancient land to hover about that little band, clickingly a-whirr among the fish.

The tubs filled; were emptied. The barrows were laden, and swept out to the tanks. Salt in a huge, white glacier moved on into the thing of cure. Fish melted from out the boats. The flotilla of waiting craft became dismembered, thin. A thing that had loomed big with disaster was brought into peremptory subjection — dwindled futilely — vanished.

Near sundown the woman retreated silently from the scene near the shore. Watching her go, Wayne felt a thing of actual strength go with her, strength dragged cleanly out of that section near the wharfs, so that the men dropped to drained limpness.

He himself went home wearily. He had seen the strength of the land exemplified. Dully he was wondering what it would be like in the mass.

CHAPTER XII.

WAYNE BUYS THE "ENCHANTRESS."

MARGARET was back again in Harbour le Grand. Somehow Jerry Wayne felt it when first he opened his eyes. He hurried downstairs. Dave Calder was already at breakfast when he went down.

"Dave," Jerry began, seating himself, "did the *Glendon* make the Harbour last night?"

"Yis, sir. De fog kept her here till early this mornin'. She just went out an hour or so ago, sir." Dave grinned sagaciously over his plate. "Miss Mendeth coom back on her, sir."

The other's eyes skewered him with a look shrewdly inquiring. Dave was carefully sopping crusts of bread in pork fat emulsified with molasses; Wayne would have classified him as a slow eater—but thorough. In spite of his apparent absorption, however, Dave's whole face seemed to beam.

"Dave, my son," Wayne began earnestly, "you'd make a rotten Mercury in those rubber boots, but just the same you're about the neatest little harbinger

of good tidings ever seen outside Olympus." He got to his feet. "You're profoundly observing." Dave munched on. "What's more, you possess perspicacity." Dave's countenance expanded greasily. "Added to that, I like you. Good-by!"

With which bewildering pronouncement Wayne caught at his cap and was out the door. Manifesting in his gait an odd little limp still, he made straight for the Mendeth house. The fog hung about in dun, gray rags above the headlands. To Wayne these were pearly wisps of utmost enchantment. The grass was wet and the little trees by the gate dripped drearily—diamond sprays, Wayne saw them. The morning was depressingly dismal—and to Wayne quite satisfyingly perfect.

Hitty Crowe opened the door, a look of exceeding great worship overlaying the timidity that sight of him usually produced. Then she scuttled in ahead of him like a flustered little moor hen.

Margaret Mendeth was at breakfast. With rather startled eyes on her visitor's bruised-looked face she rose uncertainly with her hand extended.

But Wayne snatched her impulsively into his arms. He held her close a moment, his cheek on her hair, his eyes far away over her head.

"Jove, but I'm glad to see you!" he muttered into her hair. He *was* glad. Things in him had somehow gone all sobered, stilled at the contact.

She drew away and studied him closely.

"What happened?" she asked earnestly, indicating his mottled bruises.

"Nothing. Just part of my training, I guess. I—I fell and struck a beam. Forget it. Say, but it's great, your being back. I didn't know I could be so happy. It's indecent."

The girl sat down to her unfinished breakfast, at the same time summoning Hitty with a tiny bell.

"Hitty, please bring a cup of coffee for Mr. Wayne." She turned to him smilingly. "This is going to be *real* coffee."

He grinned skeptically.

"What—here in Harbour le Grand?" Then: "I'd love to believe you, but, honest, I haven't pluck enough!"

Hitty set the steaming cup before him, served him cream and sugar, and he put it to his lips. He closed his eyes ecstatically.

"I'd never have believed it possible," he murmured. "This is all the world needed."

The girl was chatting lightly about his splendid work in her absence, learned of from her mother—about the fog, the trip down coast, irrelevant things all, and he began regarding her curiously. To him, there was an overemphasis to her brightness. She was beginning, "Oh, by the way, I saw some one up in Pulp Works who——" when, suddenly, Wayne interrupted with:

"Wait a minute." He put out a hand in the abrupt silence. "How about your errand? You failed, didn't you?"

She set down her own cup, and her eyes wandered out the window.

"Yes," quietly. A still moment and a strange little realization came into her mind. She turned around to him again. "But how could you know?"—in a wistful questioning.

He was regarding her levelly.

"I can't explain." Then: "I felt it as soon as I came near you—cool, like a drop of ether on the back of the hand." His eyes left hers reflectively. "It is very likely that I am closer to you yourself than you probably guess."

A sudden warm thrill had throbbed through the girl. His sympathy, his swift understanding was very sweet. She was grateful almost to the point of some impulsive absurdily.

"All right," he was saying resignedly, "that's settled. But what now?" He was looking at her curiously, his eyes holding apprehension, and tenderness.

"Are you—are you going to keep on? Or—or do you feel you are licked?"

Big things sang within him at the nature of her reply.

"I'm going on. And I'm far from licked!"

"Good girl!" came from him in a little husky grunt, and the moment passed. "All right!"—briskly. He whipped out a cigarette and exploded a match on his nail. "Now what is it you plan? What is it you'd like to do?"

Staring into his face, her gratitude went trailing out from her eyes almost visibly. She laughed a rueful little laugh.

"It is simplicity itself. I want to pile up a record season, and I have no vessels, no grubstakes, no ready capital. Aside from these I have—everything."

"What is the biggest need?"

"Cash."

"Where are your banks in this?"

"We've borrowed up to our capacity. They don't approve of our holding over our fish."

"With cash, what then?" Into his head at that moment with the trim little glow of a will o' the wisp, had come a sudden bright little idea. He might provide cash himself, in some crazy fashion or other.

"I might manage my crews all right. I think I could even manage my grub. But the only way I can lay hands on a Banker, I suppose, would be to buy one outright, for since the heavy toll taken last winter there isn't a vessel available on this whole coast."

Wayne was not hearing her—clearly, that is. For that little will-o'-the-wisp idea was beginning to engage him completely, was beginning to grow in brilliancy. It seemed to be playing brightly about a vessel that he had seen, a craft of beauty and great distinction—the *Enchantress*. And he was beginning to plan out rather odd details for possessing her, for possessing her and turning her over to Mendeth Company under some plan whereby they would never know who——

Wayne snapped his cigarette into the little stove and in the same moment reached for his cap.

"I'm going," he said, a little abruptly. "It looks like a busy day. And I'm glad you don't feel licked, for"—occultly—"darned if I believe you are!"

Passing down from the Mendeth house Wayne knew an odd excitement. He was going to get this *Enchantress*. And in some way, as yet unknown, he was going to place her at the disposal of Margaret Mendeth. Here his mind sped suddenly to New York, to his previous circumstance, his money affairs. Since he decided to stay in Newfoundland he had never thought of the matter of his own resources in New York. They belonged to his life there. Here, what could one do with money?

Now, things had shifted in a flash. He rejoiced exceedingly at the knowledge of ample cash at his command in New York. It was going to be a new experience to tap it for something *real* for the first time in all his life, for something that held dignity in the actual scheme of things, for something other than his own personal Sybaritic gratification.

He closed his eyes ecstatically and wagged his head from side to side, enraptured with the surging thrill of big gamble.

Across the harbor a half hour later, Tait & Brady displayed amused tolerance at their caller's errand. In five minutes, however, something of real shrewdness emerged from the contradictory personality of the man, something showing intimate touch with the world of money, something oddly convincing. He was much in earnest. And he could talk. As for the rest:

"But, sir, the *Enchantress* is not for sale."

"That's all right. But everything has its price."

"You say that," said the senior partner slyly, "as though you might have the actual purchase money in your waistcoat pocket."

"We haven't come to that yet. But don't let it worry you." A tense little moment, then: "How much did the *Enchantress* cost?"

A thoughtful exchange of glances, and:

"Forty thousand dollars."

"I'll give you forty-five thousand for her, cash."

An instant of perplexed bewilderment, and matters flashed to a basis of hard-and-fast fact.

"Listen, my dear young sir," from Tait. "Can you warrant that?"

"Yes."

"How can we know?"

"You get your magistrate to make out the papers, and I'll cover it with the actual cash—that is, if you will allow me time to get down shore to the cable station and back."

"Produce your cash, and we'll produce our documents."

Wayne snatched at a slip of paper and a pen.

"Just write that down and sign it."

A moment later:

"There's one condition in this deal that's going to be pretty nearly inviolable, or we don't do business. And that condition is absolute and permanent secrecy as to ownership. If you give me your word of honor, that's going to be enough. To all intents the vessel is to remain your own and I'm going to utilize her through you, without prejudice to you in any way, of course."

Puzzlement had crept back again. The partners looked perplexedly at each other, and back at this earnest-faced young man of the clean countenance. Then, "Agreed!" they cried.

Wayne went into immediate action. Harbour le Grand must know nothing. So Wayne commandeered Dave Calder and his motor boat and slipped downshore in the direction of Gannet Bay and the cable station at once. Speeding on toward that wire that was to connect him with the world, all his New York recollections of the morning flooded back. He could see the heavy amazement with which his uncles would receive the news of his whereabouts. He was going to wire his bank direct. Also he was advising his uncles—he was glad now he had written them—to sponsor his action so as to avoid delay.

The message sent, Wayne paced the rocky little lanes of Gannet Bay through long tedious hours, engrossed, unseeing, an object of intense speculation to every being in the town.

Before his mind's eye now was rushing the old New York existence with the flickering variety of a kaleidoscope. He could see certain haunts of his former life with a clearness approaching clairvoyance. He knew again the hurrying crowds of endless teeming street, the swarming humanity that never ceased swarming, never got anywhere. He could hear the hollow, echoing throb of ceaseless traffic; could smell the thin, pungent tang of countless motor exhausts.

Single clear-cut bits stood forth—the frantic game of "getting across" at Forty-second Street and on Fifth Avenue; traffic cops who knew him at Columbus Circle and others at Times Square; the blazing way of jeweled fire that was Broadway at night. And now he knew himself seeing it all with a cool disinterest, a calm aloofness unmoved by one single pang of homesickness. This struck him forcibly. He, Jerry Wayne, to be detained fifty years or more behind the times, and finding in it life that was real—satisfying beyond price——

Well on toward evening the young woman came out from the tiny cable office and signaled to Wayne pacing in

the grass-grown road among the grazing goats. She gave him a slip with hands that trembled a little, and a look of actual awed fright in her face. The Royal Bank of Canada would honor his check for forty-five thousand dollars, waiving identification.

Wayne strode along down to the shore and the waiting Dave. And no man in all the realm of Newfoundland was a hundredth part so rich as was he. The fact that he had at last divulged his whereabouts to his connections in New York occupied his mind not a whit, although no transaction of that same hour on all the coast, as things turned out, could have approached it in significance.

CHAPTER XIII.

"LOVE STUFF."

WAYNE'S plan for the *Enchantress* had worked admirably. Tait & Brady, hugely impressed by his prompt purchase, had fallen in with his wishes with a readiness based on awed respect. The day after the purchase, the senior partner strolled into the Mendeth office and to her great joy offered to charter the *Enchantress* to Margaret.

To an observer on the inside of the scheme, his extremely casual manner was a bit overdone, perhaps, but in her eagerness the girl did not stop to question below the surface, and his explanation that they themselves were not taking a chance on a big output slipped into her mind completely unchallenged.

Things took on a definite aspect from then on. Mendeth, Ltd., seemed to become the center of an ever-increasing activity. Wayne and the girl were much together now, side by side, in plans, in achievement. And times were when Wayne's happiness merged all else. The recalling of his previous loves shamed him these days. For instance, the day that Floss LaRue slid across his thought, he counted as a day besmirched somehow.

Late one afternoon he came to the Mendeth office finding its manager looking fagged and worn after the fierce pace of the day's work. In five minutes he had her down at the shore; in two minutes more he had her snug and relaxed in the stern of a motor boat while he himself, swaying easily upon the rudder ropes, was steering the little craft like an arrow straight out into the heart of the luminous falling day.

Far out on the gray, satiny stillness of the sea, Wayne shut off the power.

They floated, a mere speck in a softly smoldering world of pearl and rose and underlying embers. The sky was a fire fallen low. A vague, gray moon was in the east like a dropping of ash from dying coals. The sea swayed softly gray under a ruddy glow. The horizon all around was dove, and mauve, and pink, heaped with ashy clouds like piles of pearly velvet.

For a space neither spoke in the languidly pulsating stillness. Then the girl, staring at Wayne with a curious, happy little pride in her regard, said whimsically:

"Do you know that out here in the midst of all this suave distinction of beauty, you seem to really *belong* for the first time?" She laughed at the puzzlement on his face. "You know back there"—indicating the distant rugged coast line—"back there—*you,* your fastidious urban person, never really seemed to be a part of it. Doesn't it strike you as terribly odd, your being here?"

"Not lately," reflectively. "Even at first the country was so incredible, so absolutely different from any part of the earth I had ever known, that I suppose it held me entirely, like some half-scared little kid thrilled at a fairy tale. Then the happenings of those first few days—well, *did* gouge me rather deep—started some sort of deep-stung fight in me that made me stick. Since then, the grand little thing of a man-size job has

given me small time for parti-colored reveries."

A little stillness settled down. All about, the passing day exploited its tender phases. And out of it, at length, the man spoke on a deeper, more fervent note:

"Do you know, this country has really touched me. It seems to have spoken commandingly to some latent thing buried deep within me—something real, something elemental—the spirit of the eternal achiever, perhaps, buried in all men. I know that sounds like a subtitle to a movie, but you can lay it to the sunset. Anyhow, I hope you don't laugh. And that thing in me has stirred, has answered. And now I seem roused, all lit up! I'm r'arin' to go! And," soberly, "experience, alas! has taught me neither the pace to hit, nor the place to go. I only know I seem to be training for—something; that some time the day of my exam will come down upon me." A little hush. "Jove!" the man whispered fervently, "I sure hope to pass muster." Then, matter-of-factly: "It's a curious feeling."

"Has—has your life really been so purposeless before?"

"Yes. And worse. And the country here has made me feel something of life's—well, dignity, its grandness of purpose. I'm talking rot, I suppose, but this country's shamed me into wanting to make good. I'll probably fall down more times than once, but already I've begun to feel that I'm healing from the soul out." Silence. Then: "It's all *you*—did you know it?"

He was sitting beside the girl on the stern thwart, staring far away into the pale glories hovering the sea all about. A cigarette smoldered neglected in his fingers. He was wrapped in the thrall of his feelings.

A little behind him, the girl's eyes were on his face, wandering hungeringly over its features, marking each with a tenderness almost maternal—the crisp mass of coppery hair, the clean sweep of forehead, the fine, red-brown eyes, the straight nose and the deeply cleft chin. She might have been a mother at inventory with the points of her offspring. Finally, in sudden deep tenderness she reached over and touched his hand.

It roused Wayne like a current of electricity. He wheeled on the seat and gripped both her hands hard.

"Oh, little girl, more than all I've mentioned is love—for you. All the rest is secondary." He was smiling at her, absurdly self-conscious, like some hesitant, overcharged boy. "I'm afraid I can't tell you all I feel. It's funny; a man may bear witness to all kinds of love stuff, on the stage, in books, yet when he wants to get his own off his chest, he's completely tongue-tied, mute as a stringless fiddle, dumb as an oyster. However, I'm going to try—or blow up."

Clutching her hands Wayne closed his eyes, and there came a deep, frowning intentness upon his face a moment as he searched his memory. His first attempt was rather startling:

"Listen to good old Romeo:

"Love, that first did prompt me to inquire;
He lent me counsel, and I lent him eyes.
I am no pilot; yet wert thou as far
As that vast shore wash'd with the farthest sea,
I would adventure for such merchandise!"

Wayne's hand, which unconsciously had been raised to the distant shore, fell, and his eyes met the girl's. Then the heavy spell of the orotund lines blew up and they both laughed.

"A bit thick, that—what?" grinned Wayne. "Old Bill of Avon was sure hard-boiled when he came to love stuff, though. And I can't guarantee I got all its feet under it. You see, way back in college, I didn't realize that one day I was going to know you."

A soft little silence. Then, eyes closed, again was Wayne searching his memory. The girl was watching him

intently, adoringly, wrapping him completely in her very gaze. His face grew a bit sober, now.

"Here's another," he said quietly.

A little tinge of heart hunger crept into things. The girl's eyes left him, went wandering far over the throbbing satin sea of rose and mauve and pearl. Something clutched her within, at his voice:

"I see you gone from me
And the world stands still.
And love flees, mad, through the canebrake——"

Stillness there was. An intangible thing of melancholy had fallen as it were from the *triste* departing day to drench them with its indefinable sadness.

"Gee!" the man gasped fervently at length. "Pretty bum, that one! I can almost hear the thread of the pall-bearers' feet, hear the muted epiglottisses of the male quartet, and smell the flowers. Gee-e-e!"—fervently.

In the girl's eyes were tears.

And at that Wayne began swaying his head, waggishly, and patting her hand gently in time to raggy jazz:

"Don't go gettin' dem blu-u-u-es,
Dem burdensome, lovin'some blu-u-u-es——"

It did not quite dispel the sadness of the moment, and Wayne burst forth impulsively:

"Ah! Little girl, I don't know how to make love—in earnest! No man does! It's too big! A nightingale can do it; or flame—in a sanctuary lamp—before an altar! But I—no, I least of all. It can't be done. Yet"—with real fervency, real reverence—"yet I'd give the world to get into speech—into beauty, something of what you've done to me."

The girl spoke for about the first time, turning her head earnestly from side to side: "Ah, I understand." Her eyes were wet still.

Wayne kissed her hands, reverently.

He rose and strode forward.

Stooping, he spun the engine.

The boat clove a great, clean-cut, circling design on the shimmering surface of the sea. It was shaped like a heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

LOADED DICE.

TWO weeks later in Harbour le Grand fate gestured triumphantly, with loaded dice.

The thing seemed to have been incubated in a pall of fog. By the middle of August big fog came and stayed. It was not the stealing wisps of nightfall that scampered away to nothingness at touch of the morning sun. It was a great, cold, devastating presence, a mighty pall of heavy, ominous gloom that swallowed land and sea, distance, direction—hope. Even at midday the sun could scarce break through, and if, by chance, the wind shifted and forced the density offshore a space, it seemed but a hopeless, losing struggle.

In mid-afternoon it would give up. And, victoriously, the pall would come rushing back upon the coast, a veritable battalion of oncoming woe rearing upward into the vanquished sky like endless ranks of phantom gray horses. The rallying southerly would rip great detachments clean from its crest, would fling them on exultantly before it, sending them streaking wildly upon the land in dire, struggling, runaway confusion.

Then the foghorn outside the harbor.

It struck chill to all things living. As the vast gray vanguard was upon the shore, the horn rose in a great brazen-throated roar of remonstrance, like a frenzied bull desperately downed by a trampling host—rose to uncanny full-throated terror, roared along, to fall again, going under, smothered out—demoniacally hopeless.

Then one day out in that bleak, icy pall storm was born, a grim thing of ap-

palling mood, that came stalking out of the south and east to hurl itself upon the coast with malice unspeakable.

For days the steamer from down Port aux Basques way had been working her way timidly along the coast in the fog. And it was when she was creeping along to the haven of Harbour le Grand that things broke. The dismembered fogs revealed the sea a mighty heaving waste of fluid lead, a vast race course of dun, dead-colored rollers, that would mount upward far and near to menace the leaden sky, would turn sullenly green and burst impotently into great furies of thwarted, gnashing foam.

The steamer had headed out into it to clear the land. A beleaguered little black bug, she labored outward, plowing her way desperately into the deadly hell of waters offshore. It was when, well out, she was making about to make the opening in the headlands which marked the entrance to Harbour le Grand, that a sea of particular malevolence smashed her rudder.

In the deep early dusk Wayne felt it —the strange, eerie feel of disaster that the sea communicates unerringly to its people. Seated by a little kerosene lamp in his room he knew suddenly that, outside, life was at grips with death, and that close by. And he had an odd feeling of being wanted. Somewhere out there the stage was set for a lead entrance, was awaiting—*him*.

He went out. He was strung terribly taut.

He found himself making for the other side of the harbor. It seemed involuntary. He did not know why he was doing it. Once he glanced across. High up, lights pricked the blackness. They lurched, leaped, dropped, sped straight forward like fireflies. Beside him as he ran he sensed the sea of the harbor. He could not see clearly in the darkness. But he felt it there, racing up harbor with him, hissing along beside him always. Side by side with the sea he sped. Once it struck him that this night again, as on that silvery day of disaster long ago, they were adversaries, he and the sea.

Down among the lights on the other side he was conscious first of that look on the faces spurting out into lantern light. It was the grim look of acceptance. It was the Newfoundland look of hopeless resignation.

He stood in line with others peering over the brink of the cliff. He could not see plainly but in all the terrific motion down below was one great black lump that rose heavingly, saggingly, and sank with a foaming hissing like a caldron boiling over on a fire.

Staring down, Wayne's eyes saw an outline. Below, helpless against the rocks, strove the steamer.

Wayne looked at the bunched figures about. He snatched at a figure he recognized as Dave Calder.

"Dave!" he screamed. "Let's *do* something, for Heaven's sake!"

A despondent shake of the head in the lantern light.

"Not a boat in de Harbour could make 'em in them seas, sir!" was screamed back. "Their own boats be smashed, too."

Something strange struck Wayne. Into his mind flashed that book of Newfoundland sea tales in his room, and one terrific piece of heroism——

"We can rescue them from up here, with lines!" he cried out. The mournful hopelessness in Dave Calder's face seemed to madden him. "But we can try!" he affirmed with a shout. Wayne sprang into action. He snatched the men into earshot about him. He was like a madman, with his exhortation. In the men something like awe answered him. A half dozen broke into a run for the village below, for spars, for lines, for tackle.

Fiercely, Wayne marshaled the men about him. The headland was bald of

everything save its scalp lock of heath. Far back, the lanterns marked out boulders and single rocks in the blackness. In an instant ten men were rolling these toward the brink for anchorage.

Up from the direction of the harbor emerged men carrying spars, ropes, blocks and tackle. And women came forward into the spotty radiance of lanterns—whipped, draggled, phantom creatures hugging to them dry clothing and pots of tea.

In a tense frenzy men rove the tackle in the spar, thrust it forward over the brink, heaped rock and boulders over the length on the ground.

There came a single moment packed with great things. Men stood about and looked at Wayne, questioningly. And Wayne knew long since what he was going to do. On that day some weeks ago he had let a life slip into eternity. This was his moment of reparation—here was a chance to square himself, to make good. He stepped forward. A burst of terrible rain swept upon him. "Here!" he cried out, and gulped for breath. "Rig me! *I'll* go down."

It was Dave Calder who reeved the living figure into an instrument of rescue, and tenderness lived in his swift-moving hands. The man went over—and disappeared.

Among the rain-whipped figures waiting on the headland death might be standing intimately. In a great lull, a woman broke into crying, largely, mindlessly, as though the strings of terrible restraint had burst asunder.

A signal, and the waiting men were stirred to activity, hauling in with desperate carefulness. And at length a reeking, swirling plummet arose from the living blackness, and was hauled ashore.

Wayne got upon his feet, gasping, sodden, an apparition to dismay. He clutched two bundles, children, tiny little beaten human creatures, half dead from terror, which the women received among them with incoherent cries of pity. And the man was over the brink and dropping again into the abyss.

A little later after four trips, Wayne lay prone on his back in the beating rain. Dave Calder had gone over in his stead. And now the men of the steamer were being hauled up. And then came Dave, cruelly hurt, who told of a woman still down there. And in a moment Wayne knew himself making the descent again.

Down on the tiny bridge he found her, clinging animallike to the guard rail, amid slatting tatters of its canvas.

Mounting up again, with the woman's body lashed to his, he no longer knew the wind on his drenched body, the wrenched torture of torn muscles. For a new and strange sensation was rendering blank the thing of his body. Something seemed quieting him, to make way for a great questioning. He received an impression of perfume, or thought he did, from the woman lashed upon him. And it was doing things to him. Suddenly, in his half-conscious state, New York was about him once more. He began seeing places, faces, long familiar things of softness and luxury, indulgence, men and women of speedy instincts——

They had taken the woman from him, and were dragging him in across the brink. And now, for a single moment on the ground, all else gave place to the one big thing: he had squared himself at last. He had saved a life, many lives, to pay for that one he had let go. He had justified his apprenticeship to this Newfoundland, and surely the girl of his heart could now absolve him with a "Well done!" For one single instant was he supremely content!

He got on his feet and went lurching along behind the man who carried that last female. For some vague reason they were taking her to the Mendeth house. Margaret Mendeth had commanded him there, too, for dry clothing

and hot blankets. She herself was leading the way.

And again that outlandish cajolery of heady perfume—as of fresh-crushed violets—seized Wayne as he stumbled along behind. It seemed so oddly reminiscent. And now it was driving everything else out of his head—was setting him to wondering. What did it mean? What was happening to him? Something had begun to frighten him, deep in his mind.

At the door of the Mendeth house, Wayne was beginning to know. That presence of crushed violets had carried him back to that night of his disappearance. Again he faced the vague blankness of that night, the blankness that he had never since penetrated. He was awed deeply before a thing he could not comprehend. And he was—waiting—waiting—growing numb with—this waiting——

In the firelit room, the fisherman set down his burden in a chair. And a little hand of slim whiteness faltered out from the glistening wet wrappings of a man's coat.

Rescuers stared. The man Wayne stood rigid.

The hand fumbled aside the heavy, sodden clothing. An exquisite little golden creature sat revealed, a young woman of a certain hard prettiness that all the sordid wreckage of elaborate make-up could not quite rob of fascination.

Staring curiously about, she passed a tentative hand over the wet, crinkling wonder of glittering hair. Her eyes found the man Wayne, staring hypnotically among the others. She gave a little sound of ironical mirth, as her eyes met his.

"Hello, soul mate," she essayed feebly. "It was good of you to meet me. But," droopingly, "if I had known this little husband hunt into the wilds was going to stage anything like our late rescue scene, I'd have doubled for the entire sequence," a weary little pause, "including even you, sweetheart."

At one side Margaret Mendeth swiftly clenched her hands in the privacy of her garments.

The man standing stark before the little gold creature found his voice.

"You're lying, Floss!"—vehemently. "What do you mean by this 'husband' stuff?" His white face seemed shriveled.

"Don't chide me, dearest," in weary unconcern. The girl relaxed with a heavy sigh. "I'm about ready to pull my freight, as it is."

The man Mockford stepped forward from the doorway. He flapped a newspaper open and held it up. Surmounting glaring headlines, the pictured Floss LaRue smiled at them triumphantly beside a likeness of Jerry Wayne in sport clothes. "From this here bit o' evidence," he leered, "I'd say the little lady was tellin' the truth."

Wayne was stumbling out.

Outside the door, he leaned up against the wall. The whooping, slatting rain derided him unmercifully. He stood staring foolishly at his hands; in a wan streak of light from a window, he was opening and closing them mindlessly.

Some one stood beside him in the watery rays. He was peering into the white face of Margaret Mendeth.

Impulsively, Wayne burst forth.

"Listen!" he exclaimed. "I must talk to you, or—or die!"

She turned and faced him, frozenly calm.

"What is there that you can have to say to me?"

Staring into her face, Wayne had the feeling that *this* girl was a girl he had never known. Her face, white enough, was still and composed, but things that sickened him somehow, looked from her eyes. Outwardly she manifested the strength, the eternal fortitude bred in her by this country of her birth. But beneath all that flared ardent things of

passionate feeling, mad, tempestuous, tragic things of a land quite different—for instance, Spain.

"I have everything to say to you," he plunged on. "I didn't know about this thing. I was drunk! The rest framed it——"

"Does all that change *you?*"—scathingly. "The manner of man you are?"

"Oh, don't!" It came with the impulsive hurt of a boy. Then, gazing into the still inexorable face with the strange, fierce emotions playing behind it, he knew a great, falling hopelessness that broke him. He bowed a stiff little boylike bow. "All right," fatefully. "You—you make me see that victory for me was never possible. I was beaten before I began."

The woman Hagar was waiting by the door. A glow of softness was in her eyes.

Wayne was alone. He fell back against the wall. And in that one instant something happened. As certain as he was of being alive did Wayne hear—*laughter*. Great Gargantuan laughter seemed sweeping upon him from all about—down from the headlands; in from off the sea. His mind seized upon the idea, magnified it, made it real. Derisive to mockery, the land was laughing at him. About him all the night turned ribald.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

FLOSS.

THE Mendeth living room—without a fire. Jerry Wayne stood by the great empty fireplace. Floss LaRue reclined in a deep old chair. It was the day after the storm, and Floss had lost no time sending to Wayne a summons he dared not refuse. Hollow, barren, chill in the flat morning light, the place held yet an atmosphere charged, electric.

The young woman in the venerable old chair was vivid as a small spurt of yellow flame in a vault. Among the somber old surroundings she *flared*—scintillantly. She was clothed in competent garments of her own; she had subsidized a fisherman to retrieve her trunk from the ledge-held steamer, and she was now expertly arrayed.

She might have been in character also. A thousand miles from her motion-picture haunts, Floss was even now acting. She appeared supremely at ease—and wasn't. Apparently, she held every advantage of the peerless situation in her adroit little hands; but, in reality, something deep down within her—slunk. This brooding *man* was not the Jerry Wayne of impulsive midnight suppers and boyish largesse. She did not know this man. His weathered strength bewildered her. She couldn't reconcile his roughened workman's hands.

Silence.

She watched the man's brown, skin-broken fingers. She raised eyes gone suddenly sober to his face. "Not very chatty, are we?"

Wayne turned on her in a way to startle her.

"What do you want of me?" His voice had an almost murderous quality in it.

She came back lightly, although a certain wary hardness crept into the exquisite violet-colored eyes:

"Stow it, shipmate. You look at me like I was a worm—like you wish I'd dash out and commit insecticide. Don't do it. It isn't pretty. Besides it's no sort of way to start off our happy married life happily. You hurt me just dreadfully. You do, rilly." She deashed her cigarette, meticulously.

Something, evidently of high resentment, drove the blood into Wayne's face. He spoke hotly, roughly:

"Kindly finish with what you have to

say! In a couple of minutes I'm going to be gone. What is it you want of me?"

In one slim, dainty hand, the cigarette dangled neglected over the arm of the chair. The girl regarded him, a tiny smolder living somewhere in her eyes.

"Not much," she began reflectively. "First, I want you to come back to New York. I want you to fix me out with a home—just a modest little shift of eight or ten rooms *with* service, over west. Of course, I immediately gave up my own little choke-bore apartment in the downtown Everglades, as being unsuited to your wife. I want you to fix me out with my own 'inkum.' I shall expect to munch occasionally with your own crowd, and I shall want you to really square me with your two uncles. For all I've been living there, or trying to, I don't believe they've ever really seen me once."

"Is that all?"—viciously.

The cigarette came up. The girl studied it indifferently.

"All I can think of." She looked up at him carelessly.

Something smashed in Wayne.

"Listen!" he flung at her. "You're wrong in your every bet! In the first place, I don't believe I'm your husband any more than I'm your grandson, so we'll get that right at the start!"

There seemed to be dead finality in her reply.

"Oh, yes, you are, darling. Don't let that worry you for a minute. You were not quite—yourself—that night, and you left all the arrangements up to me and the gang." She shook her head slowly—reprovingly. "Surely you couldn't believe I'd overlook anything? Or that the gang would?"

She watched him turn to the mantel and bury his face in his hands. She had a strange suspicion that he was trying to drag things out from a memory that was padlocked. And she was right. And now she went on, softly, melting her phrases into the tensity of his mood:

"Don't you remember the party at Davidson's? Davidson was directing his picture over in his own Forty-second Street place, honey, and I happened to be working in it. Don't you remember; he had Sandor Goldbaum there. When the film was done he hoped to sell it to Goldbaum. And Davidson had dug up a gallon of alcohol and mixed up a batch of synthetic gin for the party, and you dashed off and came back with the real goods. And then you ran true to form and wanted to make love to every one in sight, with me as a keepsake 'f'rever and ever, ray!' Don't you remember? And Davidson realized, of course, the big advertising value of the picture to bill me as your wife. Don't you recall the taxi parade for a license? Nor the brave old Justice Peace that Davidson lowered four drinks into and who thereupon wanted to marry every one in sight, even Davidson who's got a perfectly good wife of his own?"

The head came up.

"No, I don't remember. And I can't." All the cleanness of the last few weeks tore at the man to torture him. "And I *don't* believe you." He flung about, his face gray and maddened, and stormed at her: "If you want it straight, I don't believe I ever *could* get drunk enough to marry—you!"

Something snapped. The girl was on her feet. The cigarette was on its way into the fire.

"Thanks, severely!" she spat at him. "Now you listen to me! I want to tell you that it took a very stiff price to interest me in marrying *you*. Do you get that?" A wondrous little creature of shimmering silk and gold, she poised militantly before him. "Up here you've got yourself somehow to look like a man. Back there in New York, outside your roll, you wouldn't make a hole in a piece of gauze." She moved swiftly to the other end of the fireplace and

stood facing him. "Now that we understand each other, what are you going to do?"

"This: I'm going back like you want me to. And I'm going to split New York wide open to prove this thing a frame-up—*not* like you want."

"No, you're not. Look!" From her corsage the girl drew a paper which she unfolded before his eyes. "Our certificate, darling. See the old J. P.'s seal on it. Records are fool proof. Go and make a fool of yourself if you want to, but it won't get you anywhere!"

Wayne was staring like a man in a trance. At sight of that paper, the great blankness, which in his mind had always represented that last night in New York, had burst open, and its sordid content sickened him. But now terrible things were rising in him—a huge, impotent resentment; a desperate fear at seeing his new life dissipated like a bubble; a quite horrible impulse to lay violent hands on this girl and throttle her. Finally he pulled himself erect.

"All right. Then I'll split the town wide open to be free again. Don't worry about that."

Across from him the girl's eyes seemed to be freezing slowly into blued ice.

"I'm not. When your uncles learned your whereabouts, cabled to the bank a while ago, they imparted the joysome tidings to me. The night you burst away I wouldn't have been surprised to hear of you in Shanghai, the shape you were in. So Newfoundland wasn't so bad. But I wondered what was keeping you here. It got me. I decided to come, see. I've come. And I've got the answer." There fell a little silence strangely packed with menace. "The answer is right here in this house—this little lampblack sister of sunny Spain!"

The man gripped the mantel with both hands and closed his eyes. Slowly his knuckles whitened with the strain.

"I don't suppose you ever saw 'The Hell Cat' film," the girl asked irreverently. "No? Well, the theme of it is just the theme that holds round here at present. I myself don't want you, loveliness—not really. But there's something odd in us women that makes me hate to see another woman get you. When it comes to that——"

"Oh—*don't!* Leave Miss Mendeth out, do you hear? She represents all the things you don't understand—never could understand—never will——"

"Ah-h, hop off with that!" she flung at him malevolently. "All right. I'm moving out of these quarters to spare her. But I'm going to stick right round as Mrs. Jeffrey Wayne, and don't you let that ooze out of your brain cells for one minute. And likewise, when you make New York, little Floss will be there, too."

She entered her room and shut the door.

CHAPTER II.

A SUMMONS.

TO Wayne, the ten days' waiting for the steamer was one eternal hopeless wanting of Margaret Mendeth's company. He was almost boylike in his belief that it all could *not* have happened, that, some time, he could see her. But this never took place. Then the days adrift—wandering the wilderness—alone! And the nights!

Her last words came back. They came to him a thousand times in those ten days, and hurt him every time.

And he could hear always that horrible, grotesque laughter of the land, and everything in him resented it. In his impotent helplessness, the bigness of things as he had known them collapsed. To him, the great thing of stamina dribbled out of the country. The country was only uncouth, brutal. As for the fish! *Pah!* They made him sick!

And, underneath all his hot disgust, his heart ached.

And he grew wildly resentful at cir-

cumstance—which did not seem to help. And he came to hate Floss LaRue with a slow, corroding hatred, although that did not help, either. And now he was mad to get back. He was mad to get rid of this nightmare incumbrance; fortunately there would be people back in New York who would know how to treat this situation successfully——

And then what?

What more was there beyond that? There simply *wasn't* any more. And that old life——

Wayne would shudder. And begin all over again.

Miss LaRue?

Miss LaRue was spending the time not unpleasantly.

Outside her modest, and minor, screen appearances—and playing to an unseen audience was always something of an empty gratification at best—outside her screen appearances the lady had never before played to so absolutely abased an audience as Harbour le Grand. As Mrs. Jeffrey Wayne she had secured lodgings with the magistrate's wife, a woman not entirely callous to social emulation, and her every appearance, indoors and out, was deliciously a knockout.

In all its days had Harbour le Grand never beheld so wondrous a being. Miss LaRue appeared in the streets and lanes of the village a little golden spectacle that stunned. In her own picturesque argot she "knocked 'em dead." It was her mood at times to stroll forth unhatted. Bobs among the women of the country were almost unknown, and the little boyish-bobbed figure with hair of spun gold whiffling breezily about the exquisite face, with silken limbs so artfully clad as to mingle doubt, consternation and befuddlement in one big tangled emotion, wrought on all sides wonder and abasement to the point of complete satiety.

It all served very well, very well indeed. The two weeks waiting for the steamer could be lived through bearably. It just about measured the ingenuity of her wardrobe. Miss LaRue walked; she slept a great deal; she compassed the acquaintance of every man of position among the dealers around the harbor, savoring them along niggardly to last out until her departure. Her temperamental husband she never saw. But all other men came beneath her charm and none were repulsed, not even Mockford.

Mockford nowadays seemed constantly lit. Imported liquor accounted for some of it. For liquor seemed to seep into the Newfoundland coast copiously and always from Miquelon and St. Pierre to the southward. But bland rum and irreproachable gins and whiskies did not account for Mockford entirely. His lofty spirits transcended even the glorious fuddles of constant drink. He sported something big in his soul, did Mockford.

For instance, he would leave the most delectable of drinking bouts to slip out alone and, standing rapt, entranced, sottish, spend good half hours adoring the *Enchantress,* devouring her with gleaming eyes. For already was he to become her master in a forthcoming trip to the Banks. And from that to being her owner he felt would be but a simple progression in wile. Already, in Mockford's plans, was this Banks' run a failure. It would never do to permit it to be successful. A successful run would probably mean that Mendeth Company would *buy* the *Enchantress.* And Mendeth Company should never own her.

And Mockford never lost a chance to gloat over Wayne the few times he encountered him—never. But Wayne scarce saw him, and then only with eyes that did not care.

Although none in the village might know it, that fortnight was sowing epochs in Harbour le Grand. And, in

the time to come, with none was this to be more significant than with the Mendeth Company.

Uncompromising, aloof, Margaret Mendeth was moving swiftly through the days like a white-faced spirit of determined energy. She was organizing her season into an almost superhuman effort, piling plan on plan, and setting about her sum total of accomplishment with the cold deliberation of a gambler of issues. And she *was* accomplishing. She was doing things. She scorned a niggardly advancing market. She sold not a fish. Rather she bought until her bank account was well nigh wiped out. She had fitted out the *Enchantress* on credit. And she was going along coast to mortgage the plants—to buy fish still. It was as though she sought to dissipate some mighty claims of her own spirit among demands of her business large enough and heavy enough to require them all. So she *was* achieving—big, illustrious, unexampled feats of peerless —emptiness!

For when the days closed she sought oblivion. When her crews had trudged away to the last man, and none was left, the girl would pass swiftly home. There would be a bath, a stonily eaten meal, a few words of command upon affairs domestic. Then bed and long hours of lonely, wakeful agony.

All her life, the girl had held her own personal hurts and disappointments close guarded within her. In that, she had been like her mother. The practice had grown inevitably to be part of her make-up, instinctive as breath. But this thing of shattered love was so roweling in its cruelty! Love had come to be so deeply a part of her, that its tearing out from her heart was so——

In the long night hours when the strength of her resistance became wearied, beaten down, the girl consorted poignantly with little memories: the soft, tumbled, copper locks of Wayne's hair—that first day, even, she had wanted to touch them; his boyishly, lovable frankness and disregard; his outrageous attire, of which he was so conscious when with her. His working on the shore; the terrible, grueling hardship undertaken so bravely, so uncomplainingly! The *cachucha!* His kiss! His last embrace the night of the wreck —the tenderness of it——

The *Enchantress* sailed one day. Wayne watched her go. Heaven alone knew his feelings.

Margaret Mendeth watched her go. It was her supreme achievement, and her heart was like lead.

And aft on the vessel's deck Mockford himself steered. And, his head full of untoward plans, he was a man happy beyond all measure or count. The powerful tremor of his prize's engines thrilled sturdily up the flesh of his legs and athwart his great back like assembling emotion. Constantly.

In Harbour le Grand the day came when the steamer would be due toward evening.

To Wayne the hours were leaden. At noon he left the dinner table of the Calders to pass outside. The meal had been eaten in dead silence. Occasionally he caught the grave eyes of the others sorrowfully upon him. They had come very close to him. They had lived his troubles, whatever they were, through the past weeks. In silence they grieved over him. But he could not open up his heart to them. They would not understand.

He passed down the long lane leading along the shore. He climbed down upon one of the little fish stagings and lit a cigarette.

A boatload of people was leaving a wharf just above for their home, probably in some cranny in the rocks down shore. There were men, women and children crowded on the tiny deck. A new and glittering cook stove was lashed

cockily up forward; a new bed spring leaned against the halyards. Women passed hunks of bread, amid jovialty; a grandmother inserted the snout of a tin teapot of cold tea between the eager lips of a baby; a huge man with the paunch of a Falstaff and legs of a Colossus sturdily pushed off the boat.

Wayne knew a homesick little pang. How simple and honest and eager were all these people after all, and what sweetness of life was theirs!

Then came the swift pur of a motor from up the harbor, and Wayne felt himself actually growing cold, even as though the actual light and warmth of the day were departing. A long, low motor boat swept down the surface from the Mendeth wharfs, carrying two passengers, and even at a glance Wayne knew them—the huge-shouldered Alf—and in the stern his sister.

She was leaving! And the baggage visible forward signified she might not return for some days. And Wayne could not believe it. With a great surge of impotent feeling, of hot disbelief, he argued that it could not be so. He had not thought it out, but he was certain that he would see her—somehow—before he left Harbour le Grand.

But the boat kept on. It swept swiftly down to where it picked up the smooth outside swell—turned west along the coast—vanished.

Wayne went back to the house to pack up his few belongings. Now, with all that was in him he wanted to get away from this country of sorrows. He hated everything about him. All he knew was a red-hot desire to get back to his own kind. Once back, he would bury himself deep in the life—so deep that the salvage would be stuff for scorn.

And then, that happened which changed him, changed all his life, as it chanced, strangely. A messenger, old Batron, sought him with a message—a queer message.

"Mrs. Hagar wants ye, b'y. She says: 'Tell him not to refuse. Tell him I need him.'"

CHAPTER III.

HAGAR.

ALL along the road, even in his depression, Wayne wondered. Hagar Mendeth had held in the background, a figure of mystery, ever since he came to Newfoundland. What could she want of him? For the moment his wonderment supplanted all else.

The woman was in the great living room. Even as he entered, Wayne sensed keenly how she dominated its ample distances. She stood across the fire, erect, imposing in the splendid simplicity of her presence, her fine face gravely composed, her hand resting on the back of a chair.

"I have sent for you to ask your help," she began with simple directness. "I hope when I have talked that you can see your way clear to give it to me."

Wayne knew that he bowed, instinctively almost, and although he knew his ears intrigued by the soft dignity of the woman's voice, he felt that her speech, somehow, possessed an odd carefulness. She had seated herself and sat staring into the fire, her hands resting quietly on the folds of her black dress.

She began, a little strangely, without prelude:

"Here in Newfoundland we are strong, perhaps, in things of the body; we are trained to provide for ourselves, and to do it in the face of hardship that might frighten the people of many another land. And we do it well." In a little pause the firelight showed her face brooding calmly, placid, serene in its consciousness of strength. She went on, choosing words slowly, not easily: "Beyond that, in these small outports, we are not trained perhaps. When it comes to things of—of double-dealing, of deceit, we are not equipped to take part." A little silence—intent, thought-

ful. "You have been trained in the big world outside. Your mind has found its own way among such. That is why I sent for you."

Wayne stirred, almost in uneasiness. He broke the silence:

"All you say may be true. But—I am sorry—did you know that I was leaving Newfoundland to-night?"

"Yes," simply. "I am asking you not to go."

"Oh, but that is impossible! I *must* go."

"Why?"

Wayne was on his feet. In an uncontrollable urge for activity he was pacing tensely away from the dominating figure, far back into the shadow. In a moment he said:

"I'm a joke here! I'm not this country's size, and I know it!" And, impulsively, passionately: "It has manhandled me brutally, and I want to get away —and forget it!"

"How forget it?" He felt the woman's eyes upon him from the region near the fire.

Wayne ran fierce hands through his hair.

"Lord knows!" burst from him. Then, grimly: "My own world tends to all such little matters efficiently enough; it's the best thing it does!"

A small pause. Then the woman said:

"If I am right you decided to stay in Newfoundland for what good the country might do you. Is that so?"

"Yes. I was crazy!"

"And now you are deserting—in the midst of things."

"But you don't understand! I was all lit up then by a great motive—a personal thing. And that has all been wrecked, dissipated."

"I *do* understand." A little stillness. "Better than most. Perhaps it is all but part of your training. But first, won't you listen?"

Wayne returned to his chair. He snatched out his packet of cigarettes and, from instinct, found himself mutely asking this woman's permission, which was accorded with a nod.

"First," the woman began, "I'm asking help because of my daughter; then for our general good here in Harbour le Grand. Then, for yourself."

Wayne smoked furiously. Every fiber in him had become suddenly all alive again, redoubled now by uncertainty, suspense.

With characteristic directness the woman was plunging on, her evidently deep emotion repressed beneath that odd carefulness of speech.

"You may not know, but Mendeth Company is looking ahead upon real trouble. I know not but actual ruin. We have worked hard, my daughter and I. But the signs are beginning to set against us."

Wayne's cigarette had been dragged fiercely down to his lips. He lit another.

"I do not say how much this means to Mendeth Company. I say rather how much it means to all these our people, who look to us to see them through, who get their living at our hands." The woman stopped a moment. When she went on a hardness had come into her voice: "And then, in the midst of all this has come a thing that is mean, cowardly. It has come to me that our man Mockford has sold us out. He plans to ruin us if he can—for what I know not. To-day one of our men up from down coast tells of this. We went far to charter and fit out the *Enchantress*. And now this man tells of Mockford being still down at Miquelon, in port at St. Pierre, wasting himself and his crew and us, in the life of that place."

There came a silence in which the tiny snap of a sappy stick in the fire filled the room like an explosion.

"It is for this I want you: to go down there, to find some way of straightening this out, of helping us as your world-

trained brain may tell you. Will you go?"

A moment of blank amazement, then:

"But what could I do in a mix-up like this?" Wayne turned to the woman impetuously. "I haven't the *flair,* the knack for your country. I thought I had. I thought I could make it eat out of my hand. But it is not a country that eats out of any one's hand. And —and"—staring into the deep, somber eyes of all the wisdoms, his voice well nigh broke—"besides, I've lost the incentive. I—I could not do what you ask even if I felt capable, because——" His voice faltered, dropped to silence before the change in the woman's face.

"Wait!"

Until long after, Wayne knew himself lost in those eyes. Things of great moment lived in their somber regard, things striving up from long-sealed depths.

"A little back I told you I understood—something of what you are going through. I do. Once I ran away from this country when I thought it had used me hard, in—in something the same way."

The woman's eyes had closed softly, as if to shut out external impressions from the things that now lived within.

"Will ye listen, sir?" Her face was softening somehow before Wayne's very eyes, was losing its lines of impressive dominant womanhood, was turning soft with the softness of youth, its hopes, its big, trustful aspirations. In a moment she spoke and her voice now held some passionately tender quality, and, too, the careful exactness of her speech was entirely gone.

"I ran away, sir, once, from duty, from life. I thought I fair couldn't stand the thing this country laid upon me. I was born up coast, sir. My people were Newfoundlanders for gineration. And so when I come along it seemed as though the very country itself showed in me, showed in my body—and showed in my sperrit. And, ah, sir, no one ever give it a love such as I did—sea and land and people, I was a part of it.

"A young girl, I made ready to marry, sir." The voice stopped dead, as though Hagar Doone hesitated before the lid of a sepulcher. Then it came again, huskily sonorous, but the speech of the outworlded outporter now in all its raw crudity; the woman was now a simple, great-souled daughter of a great, crude land. "You'm a young man. Ye think ye've loved. No young thing ever loved harder than did Hagar Doone! No thing could! The country took my young man! Drowned'n! Fer ahl day, whin they'd brought'n ashore I set, fair dead from the things inside me. And I grew mad to roon away, to roon away from ahl that should hold me; to roon away from the country; roon away from life!

"An' I did!" In the dead stillness: "A salt schooner was sailin' to the States. I went down aboord and asked to be taken wi' 'em!"

Staring, overwrought, as though at a passion play portrayed in a single face, Wayne saw grim things thrusting themselves stark and relentless among the terrible pathos of its lineaments.

"I cannot tell ye aboot that voyage, sir!" The voice quavered upward on a flat, clangorous bleat of pure agony, startling in its climax. "Lord! Lord! Where were ye all that time?" The woman's hand now beat softly upon the arm of the chair to emphasize her every sentence. If Newf'ndland—had set me all livin'—in the rocks—and put me to death—an inch at a time—it would never ha' equaled the like o' that!"

Her sleeve had slipped from one massive white arm. The hideous scar bloomed forth, shot whitely up out of sight, to flare forth terribly on the neck above.

After a silence:

"Nor yit, sir, was that the worst. I

tell y' now what no soul in ahl New-f'ndland knows. I got to *your* country, to New York City. In ahl that city, sir, no one could unnerstand, and I could not tell thim. I went oot t' sarvice, sir—Hagar Doone who had always been free! In that time I knew cold, and bitter famishment, and a lonesomeness when even the Lord seemed t' keep away f'm me. And in it all I learnt—I learnt——"

The woman's lids clenched—tighter yet, in some deep, mental striving. Her hand came up off the chair, gropingly; lay quivering on the air as if to feel her way through some murky depths of reasoning. "I—I can't jest put it t' ye, sir——" And then, as if her mental striving had achieved one great gleam of truth, of revelation: "I learnt then that Heaven trains the strongest of us to help along the weak. And I came back to New-f'ndland to finish—my schoolin'!"

Hagar Mendeth's eyes came open. Their great, dark pupils were pools through which grim specters may have trailed.

"I tell ye, sir, it isn't alone the matter of a strong body that makes a man. Strength begins far below all that. Every living human creature must first of all be stanch and true to his own life, must first be strong within himself, mayhap must first fight himself in the depths of his own soul, and not for gain, not for place, not even for love alone, but before all that he may be fine and ready material for the Creator that made him. And such strength brings its own reward."

A moment later, in the dead silence:

"Ye say love has left ye, sir. Is there naught that love means to ye save what ye get out of it yerself? Ah, sir, no matter what life may do to ye, no matter what ye may do to life, my daughter, underneath all, will love ye on to the end. I know her well, and I know 'tis so. Is yer own love so weakly a thing?"

Wayne rose to his feet hurriedly and moved away into the back of the room to distract himself from the sudden scalding film that had come in his eyes.

He grew calmer. And with the quieting of his mind a new thought came in—Mockford. Always hating him, Wayne suddenly raged to pass back to Mockford some of the wretchedness for which he was responsible. Besides, there was the *Enchantress,* and he, Wayne, owned her.

Finally he turned back to the woman in the chair.

"I want time to think," he said simply, and made to go.

At nightfall he was far down the harbor alone in a little grotto well up in the granite walls. Even now, after hours, was he conscious of the almost physical impress of Hagar Mendeth's strength—of mind, of body, of spirit.

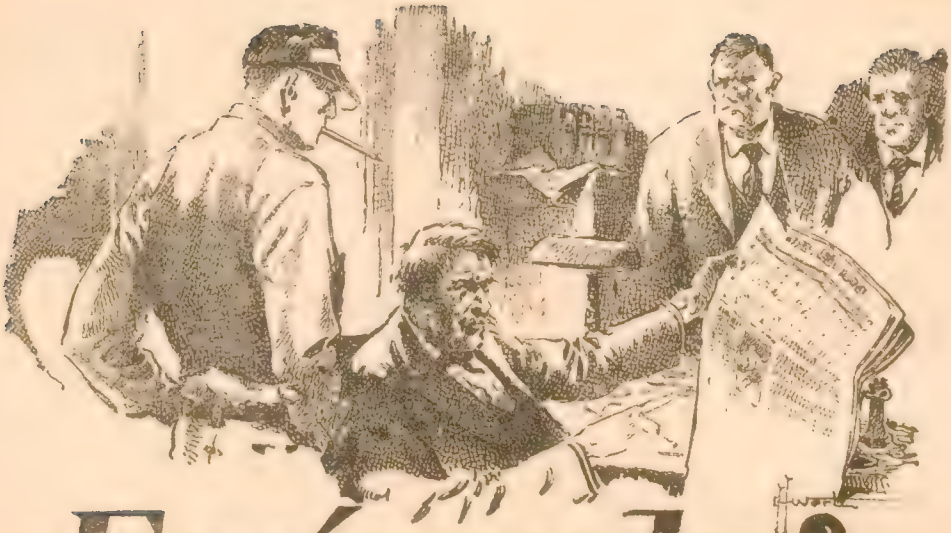
And long since, wandering alone in the dusk, had he made his decision.

Far up the harbor the steamer appeared, a cluster of scintillating, night-set jewels that glimmered and sparkled enticingly. They poised and wheeled in the distance, and took a course down toward him on the way out. Tighter and tighter did Wayne hold himself as the cluster of lights drew nigh. And now they were passing, long rows of tiny, glittering stars, with two outriders of vivid ruby and emerald, and a single lofty spark that was a flagstaff light wending stately alone. The black, oily water caught the long, spangled design and stretched it wide over satiny swells of blackness, distorted it into a broad, glittering spread of fiery-jeweled lace.

And now, only that flagstaff star—like a flawless motive—finding its way—alone—in the dark.

Wayne turned and went home.

To be continued next week.



Fogarty

By Harry Burke

A newspaper reporter who with the help of a telephone girl, set out to see that a crooked prize fighter paid up the score.

A COMPLETE STORY

COPY! Copy boy!" The new boy came up timidly, his face flushed. "Yes, sir," he said as he took the copy and swung away toward the composing room.

"Come back here!' cried McGinnis.

The new boy stopped, turned and walked slowly back.

"What's your name?" asked McGinnis.

The boy gave a sigh of relief, wet his lips and set himself for a long pull.

"Nich-o-las Con-stan-tin-o-vitch."

"Wait a minute now!" gasped McGinnis. "Take it easy. Let's have that again."

"Nich-o-las Con-stan-tin-o-vitch." repeated the boy.

"Enough!" exclaimed McGinnis. "Forget it. Your name is Fogarty." And that was the christening of the smartest, quickest, wittiest boy we ever had in the office.

In a few years he picked up weight and learning, and became the handiest, the most capable, the most indispensable cog in the whole machinery of the office —excepting Marie.

You see, Marie came to us just about the time Fogarty came. They sort of grew up around us together. Marie was the telephone girl, the live wire of the office—virile, vivid, sparkling—sometimes startling. She was so busy and animated she reminded one of the fire when two live wires cross. But Marie never got her wires crossed.

Fogarty fell for Marie a few months after he arrived. But Marie didn't fall for him. He was always "Mr.

Constantinovitch" to Marie. Sometimes he was "Fogarty" when he called her on business. She called him "Fogarty" then because it was quicker. If Fogarty tried to get personal it was always: "Sorry; line's busy, Mr. Constantinovitch."

But Marie was Fogarty's best friend. She was a marvel at finding excuses for him after he graduated into a reporter and got out on the street. Sometimes, when the city editor grew impatient under the stress of driving a big story into the office and would demand where Fogarty was or what was keeping Fogarty so long, or when was Fogarty heard from and where, Marie was ready with an alibi for him.

In time Fogarty drifted into the sports department. He was in his element there. At the very outset he displayed a genius for the work. He took to field sports at first, but soon gravitated to the fights. He fitted that work like a glove. He became known wherever fighters gathered or trained. He made friends at all the boxing clubs and kept in touch by phone or wire with every matchmaker. He bombarded them all with letters and telegrams, and no match was considered complete unless Fogarty was on the job.

Fogarty never did anything by halves. When he began the study of the professional sport he went at it thoroughly and didn't stop until he became its master. He learned every angle of the science of boxing and, what is more difficult, every trick of the managerial end.

Fogarty could hang his hat up in any training quarter—in fact, he did. Whenever there was a big match on, he lived at the camps. He had the knack of digging up picturesque features—of wringing the romance and human interest out of any event, large or small. He made it his business to know the wives, mothers and sweethearts of all fighters and found them his best sources of news.

Fogarty was in his prime when Jeems Tarbell and "Kid" McKale were in the limelight. Tarbell had downed the great man killer who had defended the heavyweight title against all comers for years. Astute beyond their understanding, he was unpopular with some; but his very unpopularity made him the greatest attraction in ring history, because millions of fans prayed that he would be whipped whenever he entered the squared circle.

Tarbell was a marvelous figure of a man. He had better than an ordinary education, had acquired polish and gentility by association with refined people, and in the pursuit of his profession combined the build and strength of a Hercules with the speed and agility of a deer.

Tarbell was reaping the benefits of the title, and that was all he wanted. He didn't care what the fickle fans thought about him. He had seen these same fans turn against too many of their idols. Wealth was rolling in, and as fast as it came he invested in gilt-edge securities and real estate. In truth, Tarbell had no heart for the fight game. He was gentle in thought and action. He derived more pleasure from clipping coupons than he did from clipping chins.

He was proud of his well-shaped features and had no desire for cauliflower ears. He was courageous—no doubt about that—but his courage was of necessity. He had fought for what there was in it, and now that he had gained the zenith of ring glory and more wealth than any fighter had ever acquired before him, he had an eye to the easiest way.

"I will fight when they pay the price," he told his intimate friends. He ducked and dodged and parried many a well-aimed challenge. "Show me the money," he replied to all.

Then there loomed across his horizon Kid McKale. There was no dodging McKale. He had come out of the West with a record of achievement —a reputation gained by victories without number. He was the antithesis of Tarbell. McKale was cruel, crushing, merciless.

McKale had risen out of the muck of the earth. He rode a freight to his first battle, and won. He went through the lightweights with ease and was graduated into the welter class, then into the middle division. It was McKale who had begged Champion Timmy Lyon to allow him the honor of being his sparring partner. Day after day he boxed with Lyon until he felt he knew every trick Timmy owned. Of course, he never showed Timmy any of his own. Then McKale disappeared, only to turn up hundreds of miles away with a proposition for Timmy. McKale wrote to his former employer:

> Some friends out here have offered me a match with you. Of course, it would be a joke, but it would be easy money for you. All I want you to do is promise to let me stay ten rounds.

Timmy was in need of ready cash. He decided to go after the easy money. He didn't train a day for the battle, and when he stepped into the ring he found McKale in prime form. McKale slashed the champion to ribbons and took his title.

By tricks and arts and the power of a corkscrew punch McKale climbed higher and higher until he grew into the heavyweight class and became the legitimate contender for the title. There was no pushing him aside. The public demanded a match, and he had the backing of men who were even richer than Tarbell. But still Tarbell stalled.

"If he doesn't agree to meet me in the ring, I'll whip him on the street the first time I see him," declared the Kid.

Fogarty was on the job, first interviewing Tarbell, then McKale, keeping the pot boiling all the time. The public was kept on edge each day, gloating over Tarbell's embarrassment and eagerly awaiting McKale's fresh taunts and threats. Fogarty made it his business to see that there was something new and ripping in every edition.

The excitement grew to such proportions that Tarbell held many mysterious conferences in his hotel apartment —to some of which Fogarty was not invited. Finally, the title holder took an unexpected tack.

"This McKale is a bluffer," Tarbell announced to newspapermen who were gathered in his apartment. "You say he is going around town bragging he will whip me the first time he sees me. You couldn't get him in a ring with me on a bet. I am going to prove it to you and show him up at the same time. I am going out to-morrow and hunt him up and give him a public thrashing for being too fresh."

No announcement could have suited the fight writers any better. The morning papers gave the champion's words the most prominent display, and the afternoon sport pages sizzled with McKale's counterclaim that Tarbell was afraid to come out of his hotel. Neither of the pugilists appeared about their accustomed haunts in the early part of the day but about five o'clock in the afternoon, by some mysterious coincidence, Fogarty happened to be in the lobby of the Gilsey House when he spied McKale loitering at the cigar counter. Almost immediately Tarbell entered through a side door. Tarbell walked up to McKale with a sneer.

"You piker!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean talking about me?" Then he struck McKale a backhand blow across the mouth.

McKale let go his foot. It con-

nected with Tarbell's shin. Before further damage could be done, their friends rushed in and separated them.

"He doesn't dare meet me in the ring!" shouted Tarbell, struggling to get away from those who were restraining him.

"You're afraid to sign for a match right now!" yelled McKale.

"I'll put up ten thousand dollars to bind a match this minute!" cried Tarbell.

"Put up your money, and I'll bet you ten thousand dollars more I knock you out!" shouted McKale, flashing a monster roll of yellowbacks, and passing them to a noted stakeholder.

In a few minutes Tarbell's money was up, and both had signed an agreement to meet in a battle for the title before the club offering the greatest inducement.

In the weeks following there was prolonged and wordy warfare over which club would get the match. The great Olympic Club, with its arena which had a seating capacity of one hundred and twenty thousand, snowed all of its competitors under with money and prestige. A purse of more than a million and a half dollars was pledged to the winner. Thousands were clamoring for tickets before the pasteboards were off the presses.

The fighters demanded two months for training. Tarbell established himself at his old quarters at the seashore, and McKale and his crew took possession of a mountain camp. Fogarty was a weekly ornament at both establishments, alternating between the two and burning up the telegraph wires daily with descriptions of the preparations under way.

Fogarty's ability to size up a fighter told him the crafty McKale was the man to watch most closely. He watched every move the smashing Westerner made with his sparring partners. He followed him on his cross-country roadwork, and when he went through his various training stunts. He had seen Tarbell in action several times before, but McKale had never performed in the heavyweight division in the East. Fogarty's experienced eye saw in McKale a master worker, but there was something lacking. McKale did everything with the air of a man who wanted to get it over with. With all of his bluster and savage abuse of his sparring partners, he failed to hide a certain listlessness and carelessness.

"Oh, he's always that way," said McKale's chief trainer. "He never gets fine. He is different from all other fighters. It takes the smell of the resin and the excitement of the ringside to stir him up. You'll never know him the night of the fight."

Most of the fight writers raved over McKale. He was more colorful and made better copy than the astute Tarbell. The public fell in line, and the first wagers on the contest were at even money. Then a deluge of Tarbell cash made the title holder the favorite.

Late one day Fogarty was whiling away the time at McKale's quarters, waiting for something to turn up. McKale was cold and unfriendly. He asked Fogarty twice when he was going back to town. Then the chief trainer took a hand and in a way none too delicate hinted that Fogarty had better beat it.

"The Kid is peevish to-night and wants to be alone," said the trainer.

Fogarty departed forthwith, but he didn't go far. He took a stand a block away and was soon rewarded by seeing a sedan drive up to the camp and a woman enter the quarters. She wore a heavy veil. Fogarty smiled and started away.

The newspaper man was waiting at the station for a train to town when an express from the city pulled in. The first passenger to alight was Mrs. Mc-

Kale. She didn't see Fogarty, and he stepped into the shadows, changed his mind about going to town and followed the fighter's wife as she walked toward the camp. He saw her approach the door of the quarters and encounter the trainer. He got up as close as he could without being seen, and heard the voice of McKale.

"I told you not to come up here, and you must go back at once," said McKale.

In a few minutes the trainer accompanied Mrs. McKale to the station and put her on the first train. Fogarty got in the rear car. After the train had drawn away from the station he sauntered forward. Mrs. McKale recognized him, spoke to him and invited him to sit down beside her. She had been crying, but she was courageous in her trouble. She gave no hint of what she had just passed through. She talked of the coming fight and of her husband's chances.

"I almost hope he will lose," she said. "I wish something would happen, so that he would get out of the business forever."

"Why, he may be favorite," said Fogarty. "He looks good to me."

"Are you going to bet on him?" asked Mrs. McKale, in a startled sort of way.

There was something about her manner of speaking and the furtive look she gave him that surprised Fogarty. It seemed to him that she had let drop a hint, and the hint stirred within him a number of thoughts and suspicions that had been trying to form into convictions since he had been watching McKale train. Then and there he decided not to bet on the challenger.

Fogarty was sorry for Mrs. McKale. He knew all was not bliss in the McKale home. There had been talk of divorce once. He made a special effort to be pleasant and insisted upon seeing her all the way home.

The day before the fight both Tarbell and McKale suddenly announced that they would go to town and spend the last night at their homes in the city. Fogarty accompanied McKale and his retinue from the camp. Somehow he felt that he ought to stick until the lights in the McKale apartment went out for the night. He sat during the evening on a stoop across the street from the doorway leading to the apartment in which McKale lived.

About ten o'clock a taxicab came up the street. It stopped a block away, and a man got out. He wore a soft hat, and his coat collar was turned up. He disappeared in the door of the McKale apartment house.

Fifteen minutes went by, then half an hour, then an hour. Fogarty could see the lights in the McKale parlor. He walked under the windows. Some one was playing a piano. The tune was "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night."

"They mean to-morrow night," mused Fogarty.

The piano pounded away without changing the tune. Fogarty thought it curious. Surely Mrs. McKale was in good spirits. He knew she was the only one in the apartment who played.

Presently the music stopped. A few minutes later the tall visitor came out. He hurried down the block, jumped into his taxi and was whisked away. The lights in the McKale apartment went out. Fogarty pondered, but he was stumped.

There was not an empty chair in the vast Olympic Club arena. A dozen ticket scalpers were planning trips to Europe from their profits on this contest. It was a cosmopolitan crowd, such as only a fight draws. The élite mingled with the lowbrows, elbowed each other in the aisles, swapped opinions, made bets. Nearly three million dollars poured into the club's coffers.

Fogarty sat in his press seat until the first preliminary was called. Then he left, hailed a taxi and hurried to the McKale apartment. He had promised to accompany McKale to the ringside. He reached the apartment just as McKale was leaving. He saw the fighter take his wife in his arms and kiss her. She was weeping on her husband's shoulder.

McKale left her standing in the doorway and passed out, his trainer and several friends following. Fogarty turned to say "Good-by" to Mrs. McKale. She was not one of those women who could scream herself into hysterics at a brutal display of fisticuff prowess. That was why she did not accompany her husband. Fogarty wanted to cheer her up, to tell her not to cry, to assure her that her husband would probably come home with the world's championship crown. He reached out his hand to her.

"I am going to pull for him," said Fogarty.

She looked at the newspaper man in a curious way. Her tears had stopped. There was something resolute in the expression on her face. Fogarty was mystified. He started toward the door to run after McKale. Mrs. McKale called him back and took hold of his hand. "Don't bet!" she said.

Fogarty backed to the door. He was dazed.

"Remember," she said, "I have your promise."

Somehow Fogarty got outside. The fighter and his friends had gone. Fogarty found a cab and followed.

Long before Fogarty arrived, the doors of the Olympic Club had been closed. There were no more seats, not even standing room, and thousands of men and women swarmed around the building. Fogarty found a police inspector he knew and managed to get in. He fought his way down the aisle to his seat.

McKale was the first in the ring. Then came Tarbell. The champion crossed the ring and extended his hand. McKale turned his back. Tarbell muttered something in disgust and walked back to his corner. A thrill of expectation ran over the crowd. It was going to be a real grudge fight.

McKale quarreled over the gloves. He let Tarbell's chief second make a choice, and then he deliberately snatched the gloves from his hand. The referee stepped in to stop a brawl. Before this McKale had stood in his corner, stamping his feet in the resin. He had worked the resin in a little pile and when he got possession of the gloves he dropped them to the floor at his feet. They fell—by accident, of course—on the resin pile. When McKale picked them up they were plastered with tiny particles of resin.

Tarbell's chief second saw the trick. Resin on a glove cuts like a knife. The referee stopped another row and, taking a towel, brushed off McKale's gloves.

The crowd saw every move and buzzed with excitement. McKale took the gloves and deliberately worked the padding back, so that the knuckles would be almost bare. Again Tarbell's second protested. The referee forced the padding back to its proper place.

Tarbell raved in his corner. He leaned over the ropes and shouted to some friends at the ringside:

"Bet five thousand for me he won't last ten rounds!"

The news ran around the arena. Bets were made on every hand. Bookmakers were swamped with business.

"Denver" Casey, politician and sure-thing gambler, who was always on the inside, or thought he was, received a secret tip that McKale would win. He passed the tip to his friends, and they scattered through the crowd with Denver's money and their own and gobbled up all the Tarbell coin in sight.

Race-track bookmakers were in evidence everywhere. They laid regular odds on the rounds. They opened at 5 to 1 against a knock-out in five rounds, and money poured in on them.

There was so much excitement, noise, rumor buzzing around them that they were loaded up before they realized it was rather odd that so much money should be wagered on a decision in less than five rounds. The referee had delivered his instructions to the men, the bell rang, and the fight was on before the professional price layers had a chance to compare notes.

If, by any chance, you had ever seen a conflict between a deer and a snake, every movement of Tarbell and McKale would have recalled it vividly. Tarbell was like the deer, clean-limbed and graceful; McKale like the snake, gliding here and there with sinuous, treacherous movements. Like the deer, Tarbell stood with hair seeming to bristle, every muscle tense, eyes fixed upon the gliding, ever-shifting McKale.

McKale shifted his attack this way and that, wishing to worm away, restless, cautious, yet never taking his eyes from his graceful foe. Suddenly out shot his long arm with the speed of the darting head of the snake. One graceful bound and Tarbell was away. Then in Tarbell would spring; but McKale, with a side movement, a wriggle, almost, was out of danger. The snake coiled and was ready to strike.

Then came the fifth round. Tarbell leaped with small, deerlike bounds. The deer, with all four hoofs so closely grouped they would barely cover a man's hand, came down on the snake, cutting the reptile in bits—grinding it into a quivering, senseless mass.

So the fight might have appeared to the inexperienced romancer. But not so to Fogarty and his suspicious mind. Fogarty saw the distinction between the real and the fake. Fogarty saw through every one of McKale's bundle of tricks. He saw the sham and hypocrisy of Tarbell. Tarbell was missing—Tarbell the skillful, the sharpshooter, who had never been known to miss a punch he started. Fogarty saw there was something wrong with McKale's sneer; it was peaceful, almost—not vengeful, vicious or cruel. It was confident—nearly a smile. He observed also that McKale was not using his corkscrew hook.

Fogarty marked Tarbell. He was smiling, flushed, confident—Tarbell who had always been pale, tense, serious in the ring. Tarbell was anything but his usual self. Why? Fogarty saw Tarbell miss and miss again. All the love for the game sickened and died in Fogarty's heart. He turned and looked at the vast crowd. Thousands of gullible fools, he thought, but they had paid their money to see a fair fight, and this was a swindle. If they only knew, if they only knew what he knew, thought Fogarty, they would rise and tear down the building.

"Do not bet!" rang Mrs. McKale's words in his ears.

The words were echoing through his brain when Tarbell suddenly swung McKale against the ropes. McKale faced Fogarty, looked down into his face and smiled. The smile touched a spring in Fogarty's chair and sent him leaping to his feet. He cupped his hands over his mouth and shot one word up into the ears of McKale. It was lost to all the others, but McKale heard it, and his face instantly registered shock.

"Faker!" Fogarty had cried.

McKale was angered. He worked his way back to Fogarty's side of the ring and sneered at him. When he went to his corner after the fourth round he sat in his chair and watched Fogarty as his seconds rubbed his legs, doused his head and spine with ice water and fanned the air about him with towels.

The band was playing "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night;" but the music was almost lost in the general roar of the crowd. Fogarty was slumped in his chair with a feeling of goneness in his chest when he caught the strain. The tune touched a second spring in his chair and pitched him into an attitude of expectancy and alertness, for suddenly he remembered it was the same tune he had heard the night before and under such strange circumstances coming from the McKale apartment.

The bell sounded for the fifth round. The noise of the crowd ceased with the ringing of the bell, and the orchestra crashed into the stillness. For a few bars the crowd paid no attention to the band. Then, "Stop the music!" some one shouted. Fogarty saw the leader waving his baton, his back to the crowd. Some of the musicians stopped, and the leader waved them to go on. They all played on with their faces toward the ring. "Stop the band!" came cries from all over the house. The manager of the club and his aids ran down the aisles. Some shouted up at the band leader. He ignored them all and the band continued to play.

Fogarty turned toward the ring. "There'll Be a Hot Time" was ringing in his ears, and it seemed to him that the whole scene, the crowd, the lights, even the boxers were in perfect tune with the popular old strain. Tarbell and McKale were sparring in perfect time with the band—*tap, tap-tap.*

Suddenly it came. The first telling blow from Tarbell's left hit McKale on the chin with the word "Town" in the chorus of the song. Tarbell's right crashed into the pit of McKale's stomach with the "To-night" of the song. The music stopped as McKale plunged to the floor. There was silence as the referee counted the fatal "One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—out!"

Fogarty ran from the building. He leaped into a taxicab, gave the driver the number of McKale's house and promised him a rich reward if he made haste. When they arrived at the door Fogarty jumped out, brushed aside the hall boy and ran to McKale's apartment. His finger was barely on the bell button before the door was opened by the fighter's wife. She was crying.

"I know it!" she exclaimed. "He lost."

"How did you know?" demanded Fogarty. "Did any one phone?"

"No," she replied.

"I want you to tell me the facts," said Fogarty. "I am going to tell the public the truth. The crowd ate it up, but I am going to publish the truth."

"You gave me your word," said Mrs. McKale, nervous and affrighted. "You don't dare."

"I gave you my word——" began Fogarty, as some one turned the knob of the door. Fogarty stepped back.

It was McKale, still in his ring costume, wearing a bath robe. His wife ran into his arms and sobbed on his shoulder.

"Cut it out!" he snarled, and then turned to Fogarty.

McKale pushed his wife away. He looked at Fogarty and then at her.

"What—did you——" he spoke to his wife in an undertone.

"No! no!" she cried.

"You lie!" hissed McKale. The reptile's hand darted forward. She fell at his feet. "Get out of here!" he lashed at Fogarty.

Fogarty backed out. He reached the office at midnight, took off his coat and sat down at his typewriter. He was slow in getting started. He made several false starts. He would write a line or two, then pull the paper out of the machine and tear it up. He did this three times. The night editor came down on him.

"Now, cut that out, Fogarty," he

said. "I know what's in your mind. This is your big chance, and you want to do something fancy. Now, take it from me, you can't be fancy. You aren't built fancy, Fogarty. You just be yourself. Write the story as if you were telling it to your pals in the back room of a speakeasy. Then it will read simple and genuine."

"I'm not trying to be fancy," said Fogarty. He got up and wiped his forehead. He was red and feverish. "I'm not trying to be fancy," he began again. "I want to know if you'll stand for the truth?"

"What do you mean—the truth?"

"The truth about this fight. It was a fake."

"What?" exclaimed the night editor.

"The fight was a fake," said Fogarty.

"How do you know?"

"I know," said Fogarty, "but I am not at liberty to tell."

"Fogarty," said the editor, "if you know this fight was a fake, you say so."

Fogarty's typewriter began to hum. He let the story tell itself in one-syllable words. His style was clean, crisp and forceful. It gave the reader a photograph of the things Fogarty's eyes had seen. He said the fight was a fake, and he made a scientific analysis to prove it.

The story was finished and in the composing room when the morning papers came in. Without exception the experts of the morning papers said the contest was a wonderful exhibition of skill. They all appeared to be satisfied. They gave no hint of a fake.

"Fogarty," called the editor, after he had looked them over, "are you sure? There's no word of a fake in any of the morning papers. This story of yours is going to raise the roof in this old town. Suppose we are called upon to prove that it was a fake?"

"Some time it will come out, proof and all," said Fogarty. "We have a chance to take first crack at it now."

"All right," said the editor. "Enough said. "I'll take a chance on you, Fogarty."

FIGHT CROWD BILKED BY CHAMPIONSHIP FAKE

That is the way the headline read. It caught the fans in the early morning just as they were laying down their morning papers after reading what a wonderful display of pugilistic skill the fight had been. The story tore the town wide open. At least five million dollars had been bet on the contest. From the losers arose a wail that would not be silenced.

Tarbell and McKale caught the edition in different parts of town, but they simultaneously started in the same direction. They met in the reception room of Fogarty's newspaper office and demanded in one voice to see the editor and see him quick. When they got into the managing editor's rooms they both demanded on what authority the paper said the fight was a fake, and demanded a retraction at once.

"Somebody has been kidding your office boy," sneered McKale.

The managing editor was always ready to pass the buck to some one beneath him. The owner of the paper was more in his thoughts than the complaining fighters. He decided to put it up to Fogarty. He instructed a boy to call the writer of the story.

It was a great moment for Fogarty. He was nervous and pale when he walked into the managing editor's office.

"Where did you get your information about this alleged fight fake?" his superior asked Fogarty.

"It was told to me in confidence," said Fogarty. "I gave my word I wouldn't tell."

"Sure," sneered McKale. "He gave his word."

"Fogarty," said the managing editor,

"we are the only paper in town that even hints it was a fake. It is up to you to prove it. Until you do prove it—well——"

"I understand," said Fogarty.

Tarbell and McKale marched out in triumph. Fogarty walked to his desk and got his hat. Every man in the office extended a silent sympathy. The significance of the conference in the managing editor's office had been felt all over the building. Even Marie, the telephone girl, knew as if she had been present.

Fogarty was leaving the office when the telephone on the sports editor's desk rang. It was a long, sharp, insistent ring. Even a telephone has its moods.

"Hello, hello," answered the sports editor, and then he smiled.

"Fogarty," called the sports editor, "some one wants you."

Fogarty returned to the telephone.

"Fogarty," said Marie, "look on page eleven in to-day's paper. There's a story there. Study the title."

"What do you mean?" asked Fogarty; but Marie was gone.

Fogarty set the phone down and reached for a paper. He turned to page eleven and found the story. It was a love serial, and the title was "A Woman Scorned."

"What's the matter?" asked the sports editor, observing a bewildered look on Fogarty's face.

"She says to look at the title, 'A Woman Scorned,'" said Fogarty. "What in hell is a woman scorned?"

The sports editor laughed.

"You'd better consult a dictionary," he said.

Fogarty got a dictionary. He located the word "scorn."

Scorn—A feeling entertained toward some one or something regarded as so inferior as to be unworthy of attention.

2—An object of supreme contempt.

Synonyms—Contempt, contumely, derision, despite, disdain, dishonor, mockery, scoff, scoffing, sneer, sneering, taunt, ridicule.

Fogarty read it over and over. Then he copied it.

"Well, what do you make of it?" asked the sports editor.

"Search me," replied Fogarty.

"Say," said the sports editor, "does Marie know anything about this fight? Is there a woman—is there by any chance a woman behind this fake?"

Fogarty leaped from his chair, slamming the dictionary shut. He grabbed his hat and shot for the door.

Fogarty dashed for the uptown subway. He tried to figure the best plan of action. He couldn't go back to Mrs. McKale—the woman scorned—at least not yet. He couldn't go to her and tell her about the mysterious woman he had seen at McKale's training quarters the night she had been sent away.

How could he force Mrs. McKale to disclose the full story without being a talebearer? His only hope was to put it up to McKale. He determined to camp on the fighter's trail, to keep him in sight every minute until McKale provided the means of lifting the lid.

Fogarty was sure McKale would open the way. Who was behind the fake? Who were the backers? Who had put up the money? The easiest way to find out was to watch McKale, for sooner or later McKale was bound to communicate with the men—to meet them to effect a settlement—in other words, to get his share.

Fogarty knew McKale would not be at home. He hurried from one rendezvous of sporting men to another and finally picked up a live trail that led to a gilded speakeasy in the 50s. One of the bartenders told him McKale was in a private room with Eddie Turk.

Here was luck. Eddie Turk was one of the richest bookmakers in the country and one of the crookedest—the very man to promote and finance the sort of coup the fighters had put over.

"What are they doing?" Fogarty asked the bartender.

"Counting dough," said the drink mixer. "The waiter was just in with another cold bottle. He said he never saw so much important money in his life."

Fogarty left the place and took up his stand across the street from the speakeasy. He saw McKale come out, and followed him three blocks down Broadway to the Commercial Bank. Fogarty watched through a window. McKale went to a cage marked "Letters of Credit." Fogarty saw him talk to the official in the cage and then pass through the gold-lettered window a bundle of currency. In a few minutes McKale received a slip of paper which he folded and put in his wallet.

The fighter walked out of the bank and paused on the curb of the sidewalk. For a few moments he waited patiently. Then he looked at his watch. He turned his eyes uptown and, failing to single out of the maze of traffic the thing he sought, he began to pace up and down.

As the minutes flew by, he grew more and more restless. Then, suddenly, from behind a car, a sedan drew up at the sidewalk beside him. There was a woman in the rear seat. Fogarty recognized her as the mysterious visitor at the training quarters. McKale stepped into the seat beside her, giving an order to the driver as he settled himself.

Fogarty hailed a taxicab. He planned to keep McKale and his companion in sight at whatever cost. But the chase proved short. Six blocks farther on, the sedan stopped in front of a steamship office, and McKale and his companion entered and approached a clerk. The woman took an animated part in the conversation. Fogarty saw the clerk make out what appeared to be steamer tickets, hand them to McKale and receive a sum of money.

Fogarty decided to let McKale and his friend go their way. It seemed to him that it was more important to learn why McKale was engaging steamship passage, where he was going and when. When McKale had disappeared Fogarty walked into the office.

"I had an appointment here with Kid McKale," Fogarty addressed the clerk.

"He just left—not two minutes ago," said the clerk.

"Did he get fixed up?" asked Fogarty.

"Yes—O. K.," said the clerk. "They sail on the *Cretonia* to-morrow."

"A woman scorned," Fogarty murmured to himself as he regained the street. He took from his pocket the paper on which he had scribbled the meaning of the word, "scorn." "A feeling entertained toward some one regarded as so inferior as to be unworthy of attention," he read.

"Well, Mrs. McKale would regard this beauty as worthy of her attention if she knew," thought Fogarty. "But how is she going to know?"

His thoughts reverted to Marie. Wasn't Marie an expert on women scorned? Marie had given him the idea, and it was up to her to find a woman's way to start the machinery. He soon had her on the telephone.

"Marie——" he began.

She shut him off. Directly she came back.

"Mr. Constantinovitch," she said, "you forget yourself."

"I'm sorry," he said. "I won't call you Marie again, Marie. Now, wait a minute. Listen—I—I've got all the dope but you'll have to tell me how to tip off the woman scorned."

Fogarty told Marie about the mysterious woman and the steamship tickets.

"When does the boat sail?" asked Marie.

"At ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

"In that case," said Marie, "Mrs. McKale will receive a very important message at nine. You call me at nine fifteen, and I will tell you what to do. Good-by."

Promptly at nine the next morning Mrs. McKale's telephone rang. A pleasant voice on the other end of the wire gave her a message.

"This is the office of the Interocean Steamship Company. We are sorry to inform you that we are compelled to change your cabin on the *Cretonia*. One of our clerks——"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Mrs. McKale. "I don't know what you are talking about."

"There can't be any mistake," said the voice. "Mr. McKale called at our uptown office yesterday and engaged passage on the *Cretonia* sailing at ten o'clock this morning."

"What—what time is it now?"

"Nine three," said the voice.

Mrs. McKale hung up her receiver. The voice, it seemed, had said enough.

"Everything is arranged," Marie told Fogarty when he called up. "Better have a camera man on the job. There may be a good story. The woman scorned will be at the ship. And, say, Mr. Con—I mean, Mr. Fogarty, I wish you luck."

Fogarty rushed to the *Cretonia's* pier. He pushed through the crowd, climbed the gangplank and took a stand on deck where he could survey the scene below. He saw the tall figure of McKale approach, the mysterious beauty at his side, both laden with bundles and grips. The stewards relieved them, and they climbed aboard without a backward look.

Fogarty waited and waited. He began to grow nervous. Where was Mrs. McKale? Had something gone wrong? The warning whistle blew—blew all the hope out of his heart. The vision he had pictured of the woman scorned meeting the one who derided her was fading. He was the last to move down the gangplank.

Fogarty was walking down the plank when a taxicab came racing down the pier. A woman sprang out before it stopped. It was Mrs. McKale. She leaped to the foot of the gangplank just as the lines became taut to swing it from the pier. She struggled to get by the guard.

"Don't let that woman come up!" a voice shouted from the upper deck.

Fogarty saw McKale fling a crumpled bill to the pier, and the next instant a command was given and the gangplank was swung free.

Mrs. McKale became hysterical.

The newspaper man walked up to her and placed his hand on her arm.

"What is the matter" he inquired.

The woman turned to Fogarty as one drowning to a rescuer.

"Oh, help me to get aboard," she begged. "My husband is on that ship with——" She stopped as if ashamed to confess her plight.

"Come down to the end of the pier," he said, "and you can see him."

Mrs. McKale stood with Fogarty by her side as the great vessel slowly moved into the river. McKale was standing at the rail with his fair companion by his side. He looked down at his wife and sneered. His true character was now revealed. He was the reptile again. His very fangs showed.

"Au revoir," he called.

The sneer and heartless taunt stiffened Mrs. McKale, wiped the tears from her eyes, brought color to chase away the pallor and set her chin firmly.

"Laugh!" she cried up to her husband in piercing tones. "It will be your last laugh!"

She turned and put her hand on Fogarty's shoulder.

"I'm going to tell him the truth!" she shouted. "Do you understand—the truth—you cowardly faker?"

The reptile squirmed and coiled as

if to strike but the prey was beyond its reach.

Mrs. McKale told Fogarty the truth. She told it to him clearly, sparing no details. Under the guidance of her attorney, she prepared an affidavit. It formed a part of her application for a divorce. She told how Tarbell and McKale had made a secret agreement with Eddie Turk to swindle the public. McKale had agreed to quit to his opponent, and Tarbell and McKale had each put up a solid cash guarantee that they would keep their agreement with Turk, whose agents were to bet on Tarbell all over the country.

She swore that Tarbell and McKale had kept their agreement in part, but had double crossed Turk in finishing the fight in the fifth round instead of the tenth. She swore that the night before the fight Tarbell visited her home, and that Tarbell and McKale rehearsed the fatal round while she played "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night" on the piano; that every movement and blow of the last round was timed to the music.

She swore that Tarbell's and McKale's personal agents were commissioned to bet that they could name the round and that the men did not know when they entered the ring in what round the fight would end. The agents of the fighters were to bribe the bandmaster before the tenth round, she said, and the tune, "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night," was to be the cue to the fighters.

Fogarty upset the office when he rushed in with the affidavit and the story. The managing editor and the city editor took turns in seizing his copy from the typewriter.

And things began to happen as the paper reached the street. Denver Casey, the gambler, was in his clubrooms a few blocks from the office and was one of the first to see it. Denver had lost a fortune, and all of his aids had been cleaned. By unanimous vote a committee of huskies was formed to interview Tarbell. Denver lit a fresh cigar and winked at a picture on the wall as the gang started uptown.

The committee found Tarbell in his hotel, in the midst of a group of admirers, passionately explaining to them what a hard world it was, and how little chance there is in it for an honest man. The leader of the committee listened a moment, took out his handkerchief and ostentatiously wiped his eyes, then slugged the champion of the world with something hard.

The first lieutenant, the second lieutenant and the third lieutenant of the committee captain contributed punches, pokes, kicks and wallops to various parts of Tarbell's anatomy in such businesslike fashion that the champion forgot his title, forgot his crown of pugilistic glory and took to his heels like any ordinary individual who was overwhelmed by force of numbers.

Mr. Tarbell has never returned to the prize ring, much less to the city of his former conquests. Oddly enough, Mr. McKale is now living abroad under an assumed name.

Oh, yes, Fogarty is still working on the paper. He was put on politics soon after the "Fake of the Century," as that championship battle has been called since his exposé, and he was given a big enough raise in salary to give him courage to approach the peerless Marie and ask her the all-important question. She accepted him for better or for worse but, as she didn't want to call him Mr. Constantinovitch any more, the office gave them a wedding present—an order signed by a supreme court justice—changing the new political editor's name to just plain "Fogarty."

This story was written by a new author. Did you like it?

A Chat With You

HAVE you ever taken a trip in an airplane? At most county fairs it costs a dollar a minute. It is not so dangerous now. Once, only dare-devils attempted to fly. Now, sedate ladies get into luxurious planes at Croydon in England and float over to Paris in the easiest possible manner. There are none of the discomforts of the Channel crossing with its chop seas and twisting tides. This new sort of ship neither rocks nor makes one seasick. The salon for the passengers is as comfortable as any Pullman. Fine chairs, plate-glass windows through which one may view the country sketched like a map far below. Room enough to walk up and down and stretch your legs. A sense of security that one could not possibly feel in the old pre-War airplane.

* * * *

AN interesting trip, but some trips in the future will be more interesting still. It will not be long before passenger planes are crossing the Atlantic and Pacific. Not just such swift things as are guided by the genius of a Lindbergh, but great big ships of the air with a big cabin where the passengers may lounge, read, smoke, eat and otherwise enjoy themselves.

We will say no more about this, for Mr. Will McMorrow can give you a better peep into the future than ever we can. He does so in the next issue of this magazine. It is a novel, complete in that issue, out next week. It is called "The Sky Buccaneers."

Why spoil a good story by telling the plot in advance? But if the pirates of the Spanish Main were interesting and exciting, these pirates of the air are more interesting still. McMorrow has been both soldier and aviator. He knows something about both fighting and flying. Also he knows how to write a stirring tale that tingles. There are thrills in this story. It is one of his best.

* * * *

HOLMAN DAY'S name is sufficient introduction to any seasoned reader of this magazine. His accustomed scene for a story has been either the big woods, or the sea coast of Maine. Now he suddenly shifts to Oregon. Holman is on the West coast now. Read this story and let us know what you think of his new background.

* * * *

FITZHUGH GREEN is a commander in the navy. He has written for us the tale of two tired sailors who, seeking a place to sleep, climbed into the basket of an observation balloon lashed to the deck of their warship. When the lashings came loose and they found themselves shipwrecked in mid-air the interest deepens in the story and it begins to get more and more exciting. How would you like to peep down at Hollywood and all its beauties from the swinging basket of a soaring balloon? So near and yet so far!

* * * *

CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK is a Kentuckian and inherits from his blue-grass ancestors a natural love for the thoroughbred horse. If you have not read the first installment of "Flying Hoofs," turn back and read it now. Never mind what we say. The story will speak for itself. The next installment is even better than the first. Buck

is a real writer and he is at his best when he writes about the sport of kings.

* * * *

ANOTHER serial that one would do well to follow is "The Gilded Weakling," by Will Beale. Here is the tale of a man who lost himself and found himself again, who made the hard climb from the depths to the heights. It is a tale of the northeastern sea coast, an outdoor story with a salt tang in the air of it, stirring, exciting and altogether worth while.

* * * *

IDWAL JONES is Welsh by blood, a wanderer and observer of things by choice, a great teller of a good story by gift. He knows gypsies as few folk since George Borrow have ever known them and in the issue, out a week from to-day, will tell you the story of the strange ways of gypsies in a circus with a horse.

* * * *

IN the next issue, Leguerre of the Lost Division appears again. There is only one writer we know of who understands the secret, tortuous and perilous ways of the free-lance diplomatic agent, whose name never gets in the papers but who has to do with the making of history. The inside story of anything is always better than the publicity handed out to the papers, and Howard Fitzalan, who chronicles the doings of Leguerre, gives you the inside stuff. All the above will be on the news stands for you next week, but it would be well if you ordered your copy in advance.

THE POPULAR

In the Next Issue, April 28, 1928

The Sky Buccaneers	WILL McMORROW
For the Honor of Gros Brun	HOLMAN DAY
Grogan Goes to Heaven	FITZHUGH GREEN
Flying Hoofs A Five-part Story—Part II.	CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK
Spring in the Village	IDWAL JONES
Leguerre of the Lost Division The Red Hand	HOWARD FITZALAN
The Gilded Weakling A Five-part Story—Part IV.	WILL BEALE
A Chat with You	THE EDITOR

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